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MATTHEW SALACUSE

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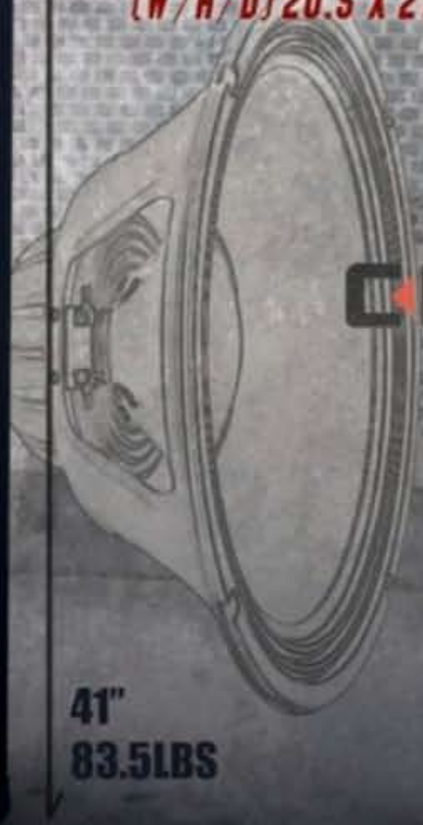

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COMMUNITY

LOWDOWN

BRIAN FOX

Oppa GangNAMM Style

NOW THAT WE'VE ROUNDED THE CURVE WELL INTO 2014, HERE'S HOPING IT'S BEEN SWELL so far for all y'all. Here at BP HQ, we've hardly had time to recover from Bass Player LIVE! and the holiday deadline crunch, and the NAMM Show is already upon us. Real talk: for those of us who attend the show in some sort of working capacity—whether it's glad-handing in endless meet-and-greets, hawking the latest improvement on this year's whatchamadoodle, or hitting the show floor in a hopeless attempt to "see it all," NAMM can be a bit of a grind, and it's often with a not-so-underlying sense of dread that we contemplate its return. But this year, I'm actually kinda excited. Maybe it's because I know so little about what I'll see. In recent years, we've been able to track trends—neodymium cabs, Class D amps, modeling software, you-name-it. Aside from a few cool products I'm excited to geek out on, I know next to nothing of what to expect from this year's show. Will 2014 be a big year for bass gear? We'll see. For now, I'm content to put my feet up—prior to the severe beating they'll take in a few days—knowing that I'll soon be lucky enough to check out the coolest gear on the planet with some of the coolest cats in the land. Then, exhausted, I'll come back and share whatever I find with a few thousand of my closest friends. See you then.

BP Zo !!!

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WHETHER I WANT TO PLAY AT A SMALL coffee shop or a large venue, this rig accommodates it all. My bass guitars are a Fender American Vintage '62 Jazz Bass with '60s stacked concentric controls and a 3-ply tortoise (with black finish) pickguard, a Fender American Vintage '58 Precision Bass in white blonde with maple fingerboard, and a Fender American Vintage '62 Precision Bass finished in nitrocellulose lacquer with a rosewood fingerboard.

My sound gear consists of an Ampeg SVPCL bass preamp, an Ampeg PF-115HE Portaflex 1x15 bass speaker cabinet and PF210HE 2x10 bass cabinet, an Ampeg SVT-410HLF bass cabinet, and an Ampeg Micro-VR bass amp head and SVT210AV 2x10 stack. My rack gear consists of an ART 4x4 Pro rackmount 8-outlet power conditioner, a DBX 160A compressor/limiter, an Ampeg SVT3 Pro bass amp, a Line 6 Relay G90 rackmount digital wireless system, and a Behringer BTR2000 rackmount tuner. —DANIEL FOSTER

Got a rig you think we'd dig? Send a photo and description to digmyrig@gmail.com.

COURT OF OPINION

The 1964 Höfner built for Paul McCartney recently sold at auction for $201,800. If you could own any bass ever, what would it be?

Join the conversation at facebook.com/bassplayermag.

Berry Oakley's sunburst "Tractor" bass.
—Cuzin' Locust Johnson

John Entwistle's Alembic Explorer.
—Ronald Ward Jones

Jaco's Bass of Doom.
—Steven Glasser

One of Les Claypool's Carl Thompson basses.
—Brad Tyler

Geddy Lee's double-neck Rickenbacker.
—Jason Somers

James Jamerson's Fender P. Then I would return it to his family.
—Joe Salesi

Donald "Duck" Dunn's Precision and Stanley Clarke's Alembic.
—Anthony Gatewood

John Entwistle's 1970 Rickenbaker 4005 L "Lightshow" with internal lights.
—Ron S Dyer

Jethro Tull's Glenn Cornick's Gibson Thunderbird (you can see it in their Isle of Wight 1970 performance).
—Pedro Mateus

The Gibson EB-1 that belonged to Felix Pappalardi.
—Ron Gallagher

Bill Black's upright.
—Aaron Harris

Phil Lynott's black Fender P-Bass, as seen in Thin Lizzy's 1976 performance of "Jailbreak" on *Top of the Pops*.
—Ben Hooper

TIMELINE

This Month In Bass History: March

3rd Upright icon Jimmy Garrison born, **1934**. Jim Lea and Slade are chart champs with "Cum On Feel the Noize," **1973**.

4th Yes mainstay Chris Squire born, **1948**. Metallica bottom-dweller Jason Newsted born, **1963**.

7th Tower of Power's very own Rocco Prestia born, **1951**.

8th Jazz bassist and tuba player Red Callender born, **1916**.

9th Geezer Butler and his band Earth—having recently changed its name to Black Sabbath—has its first show, **1970**.

10th Jeff Ament of Pearl Jam born, **1963**. Roger Waters and Pink Floyd release *Dark Side of the Moon*, **1973**.

11th The 5th Dimension, bolstered by the stellar work of Joe Osborn, wins a Grammy for "Aquarius/Let the Sun Shine In," **1970**.

12th Iron Maiden iron man Steve Harris born, **1957**. The Allman Brothers and Berry Oakley play the first of two shows later released as *At Fillmore East*, **1971**.

13th Dixieland/swing composer, arranger and bassist Bob Haggart born, **1914**; U2's Adam Clayton born, **1960**.

15th Grateful Dead bass man and jam-band pioneer Phil Lesh born, **1940**. John Paul Jones and Led Zeppelin are No. 1 in the U.K. with *Physical Graffiti*, **1975**.

18th Neil Young's "Heart of Gold," blessed with a Tim Drummond bass line, is the No. 1 U.S. single, **1972**. Paul Simon has the No. 1 album spot with a self-titled solo debut backed by Jackie Jackson, Ron Carter, Joe Osborn, and Russell George, **1972**.

19th Rock bass monster Billy Sheehan born, **1953**

22nd R&B/blues bass god Jerry Jemmott born, **1946**

24th A Ronnie Baker bass line makes the O'Jays' "Love Train" the No. 1 single, **1973**.

25th Studio goddess Carol Kaye born, **1935**. John Entwistle and The Who—along with Jack Bruce and Cream—make their U.S. debut, **1967**. Roberta Flack's *First Take*, with notable contributions from Ron Carter, is No. 1 in the U.S., **1972**.

26th James Jamerson's magic helps push Marvin Gaye's "I Heard It Through the Grapevine" to the top of the U.K. charts, **1969**. Producer, sideman, and session ninja Justin Meldal-Johnsen born, **1970**.

28th Headhunters legend Paul Jackson born, **1947**.

29th Blood Sweat & Tears' self-titled album, featuring Jim Fielder, is No. 1, **1969**. Meters man George Porter, Jr. funks Labelle's "Lady Marmalade" to the top of the charts, **1975**.

THE REAL WORLD

Jay Lamm

Home base Denham Springs, Louisiana
Occupation Musician, planetarium staff at Louisiana Art & Science Museum
Gigs Cirque Dreams Rocks, Cea Serin, various other ventures
Basses Conklin GTBD-7, MTD Kingston Z fretless, NS Design Electric Upright, Ernie Ball Music Man Bongo 6-string, and Ibanez SR705 5-string
Rig My main rig, live and in the studio, is a rackmount Line 6 POD X3 Pro, but I also use a Hartke 3500 head with Hartke 2x15 and 4x10 Transport cabinets
Effects Line 6 POD X3 Pro with foot controller
Strings MTD nickelwounds
Heroes & inspiration Michael Manring, Randy Coven, Victor Wooten, Steve Bailey, Ayn Rand, Clive Barker, Joe Satriani, Yanni
Contact WhoIsJayLamm.com

How did you come to play bass?

I started out playing piano after being inspired by watching *Evil Dead 2*. All my school friends played guitar and they wanted me to play bass, but I never knew what the bass did. Then I heard Megadeth's "In My Darkest Hour," where I could finally hear the bass and its role in the context of a band's performance. I interpreted the bass as the underdog in a band, the misfit that no one understood. I identified with this, and I wanted to play the bass and elevate it to a higher status.

What's a lesson you've learned along the way?

Live, I've learned that it's better to sound good than to look good. Being flashy is great when it's in context, but it's important to know that you should serve the integrity of the song first. In the studio, don't compromise when it's your song—but if you're a hired gun, do whatever you can to realize the dream of the songwriter that hired you. On tour, don't forget what it took for you to get to where you are. Be gracious to your hosts, play every show like it's the first, and always tip the housekeeping staff. And always stretch your hands, wrists, and forearms before a show.

What are your musical goals?

Constant improvement is my goal. I want to continue touring as a musician-for-hire; I want to take my band, Cea Serin, to higher levels; and I want to continue learning and improving on the bass.

MARDOZ LULE

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ALEX KLUFT

Hoochie Coochie Men

Don Was, Jerry Jemmott, and Jorge Evans (l–r) savor the groove in a tribute to the Chicago blues great Willie Dixon at Bass Player LIVE! 2013.

BASS NOTES

RUSSIAN CIRCLES

Brian Cook Cinematic Distortion

BY JON D'AURIA | PHOTOGRAPH BY HILLEL ZAVALA

WHEN BRIAN COOK FIRST HIT THE SEATTLE METAL SCENE IN 1993 with his influential mathcore band Botch, he made a deep impression with his aggressive riffs and brash creativeness in a technical trio format. When the group disbanded in 2002, Cook went on to form These Arms Are Snakes, where he used his bass skills to explore the realm of experimental post-hardcore music. From there he was recruited by the Chicago instrumental rock outfit Russian Circles, who recognized that his mastery of distorted tone and ability to juggle effects and pilot loop stations made him the right man for their darkly orchestrated sound. Russian Circles recently released its fifth album, *Memorial*, which displays the depth and maturity of Cook's playing. Equipped with his go-to Gibson Ripper and an overflowing pedalboard, Cook's bass work fills out the low-end spectrum, making it hard to believe that his band is merely a three-piece. Songs like "Burial" and "Ethel" show his grit in the pocket and his ability to maintain a deep foundation of lows while still crunching decibels with more than a few distorted layers and fuzz-powered channels.

What were your goals on *Memorial*?

The songs were dense and layered without me even playing on them, so my goal was to accent the most important elements of each song. But that means a very different thing in the context of an instrumental band. With only three instruments, every person needs to be doing something engaging and interesting. At the same time, we aren't particularly interested in virtuoso music. I don't want to be Victor Wooten.

INFO

LISTEN

Russian Circles, *Memorial* [Sargent House, 2013]

EQUIP

Basses Gibson Ripper II, First Act Delgada
Rig Verellen Meatsmoke, Ampeg SVT-810 cabinet
Effects Electro-Harmonix POG2, Electro-Harmonix Memory Toy, DigiTech Whammy, Tym Big Bottom V2, Fuzzrocious Rat Tail, Fuzzrocious The Demon, Dwarfcraft Eau Claire Thunder, Dwarfcraft Pitchgrinder, Akai Headrush E2, Way Huge Swollen Pickle
Strings Cleartone Medium (.045–.105)

Your use of distortion has increased over the span of your career.

It's funny, because when Botch started, I was really opposed to distortion. I think it was because I only noticed distorted bass when it was done poorly. Somewhere along the way I started using fuzz for parts where I wanted a big volume jump. One of my favorite bass players growing up was Rob Wright [of Nomeansno and the Hanson Brothers], and I never could figure out how he got his tone. Now I realize that he adds just a little bit of overdrive—not enough to distort, but just enough to make the bass more punchy and prominent. That's the sound I had always been subconsciously going for.

You use a lot of loop pedals and effects live. Is it tricky to manage all of your gear and hit your parts onstage?

That's the hardest part about playing live. There isn't much on the fingerboard that really stresses me out; all the stress comes from pulling off the changes on the pedalboard. Mike [Sullivan, Russian Circles guitarist] made an analogy the other night about how it can sometimes feel more like playing a video game than playing music. It's like doing the *Contra* code with your feet while playing *Guitar Hero* with your hands.

Describe your playing technique.

I'd describe it as ham-fisted. Heavy-handed. I grew up on punk and hardcore bands—stuff that lacked subtlety. As I've gotten older, I've learned to appreciate players with a bit more nuance. But my default technique is still just digging into the strings and throwing in power chords whenever I can get away with it.

Was it difficult taming your playing for the cinematic sounds of Russian Circles?

It was definitely a new approach, but I was ready for that challenge. It allowed me to try out new things, and it made the writing and recording process a lot more interesting. Writing was no longer just about making riffs; it was about crafting tones. Recording is no longer a matter of playing things perfectly; it's about getting an interesting performance.

How have you evolved from the Botch days to this point in your career?

The big development is that in my younger years I measured quality by how complicated and f'ed-up something sounded. I wanted things to sound wrong and difficult. Now I'm more interested in variation. I want every song to have its own timbre. I still love gnarly brutal stuff, but when it comes to Russian Circles, I'm less interested in cranking everything at a full 10 at all times and more interested seeing what 1 through 10 sounds like. **BP**

BEYONCÉ

Lauren "LT" Taneil

In The Key Of Bey

BY GREG PHILLIPS

"THE BASS CHOSE ME—I DIDN'T REALLY CHOOSE IT. I was seven years old," says Lauren "LT" Taneil, currently holding down the bottom in Beyoncé's Mrs. Carter Show world tour. Encouraged by her producer/musician father to play music, LT and her two sisters formed the GG's, a band that started out playing churches and graduated to a major-label record deal. Fortune favored LT in 2010, when Beyoncé's musical director witnessed a GG's show and scooped her up, initially for the Black Girls Rock Awards. Following that gig, she backed Beyoncé at the Michael Jackson Tribute and went on to replace Divinity Roxx as the band's permanent bass player. While Beyoncé belts out show-stopping ballads like "Halo" and "Irreplaceable" in the current show, the musician-minded folk in the audience might be just as thrilled by the booming bass vibrations LT leaves in their chest. Not only does Taneil deliver sonically, but with her distinctive Neon-strung Music Man 5-string bass and a lipstick color to match any outfit, the part-time fashion designer has also slotted seamlessly into Beyoncé's style-focused aesthetic.

INFO

EQUIP

Basses Two Ernie Ball Music Man StingRay 5 HH 5-strings, Little Phatty Keybass
Strings DR Strings Neon
Rig Line 6 HD Pro
Accessories ButtKicker low-frequency transducer, Native Instruments Komplete Ultimate 9 for the bass synth

Lauren "LT" Taneil continued

How much of your own playing style have you incorporated into Beyoncé's band?

I am able to incorporate my roots and also many other styles. I grew up on a lot of old-school funk, gospel, and R&B music. I appreciate all genres, and this helps me be ready for any music environment I decide to put myself in. When on any gig, I make adjustments accordingly, but I can only play like myself and be me. In my band the GG's, I'm free to play whatever and however I like. It's a positive-energy-only zone! We all have great ideas, like to be creative, have fun, and laugh, which is very important.

Would you say that being part of this 11-piece band has changed the way you play?

Yes, for the better. Anytime I'm playing with other musicians, I like to grow and take whatever I can from them. I think that's what we're supposed to do as musicians. When you get to another level of playing, it changes the way you play, the way you think.

Had you tried different ways of playing before arriving at your own style?

I have not yet felt that feeling of arrival. I'm self-taught—never been to school for music. I am always constantly learning something new. Learning is addictive; you never stop! I started playing when I was seven, so I believe that I'm just a product of my environment. My dad would sit me down and teach me grooves, how to slap, and scales; I guess that was my music school. It's still the base of my playing today. I love to groove! It's all about the groove and whatever I do, it's got to be funky.

In the dense mix of a Beyoncé show, what discussions have you had with your tech Sean O'Brien regarding tone?

If you can't hear me, then for sure you can feel me. In this music environment, sometimes the bass is meant to be felt, not heard—especially playing in huge stadiums and arenas. I can hear and feel myself because I'm using in-ear monitors and also have a ButtKicker so that I can feel myself playing. I go for a really warm, clear, clean tone. People comment on the bass vibrations that they feel. I have discussions all the time with Sean, the front-of-house engineer, the in-ear monitor engineer, etc., to see how I can have the best tone in this environment. It was a process, and I'm still not 100 percent satisfied, but it's the best for this situation. **BP**

BP RECOMMENDS

MUMPBEAK
MUMPBEAK

[RareNoise]

Sure, production by committee has been the default mode in hip-hop and pop music for years, but left-field fusion prog-rock with an electronic bent? Not so much. Mumpbeak, the brainchild of Brit keyboardist Roy Powell, features four heavyweight bassists—among them, **Tony Levin** and **Bill Laswell**—in top form as they collaborate across gestures, genres, and oceans, with Laswell adding effect flourishes and final touches from behind the mixing board.

The project is a lively throwback to a time when instrumental rock was analog-thick and bristled with open-ended jams until the tape ran out. Powell's distorted Clavinet leads the way, with bassist **Shanir Blumenkranz**—recruited by Laswell from John Zorn's circle of upstarts—and drummer Pat Mastelotto providing most of the hyper-syncopated grist. "Forelock" conjures shades of (very) early Rush, the bass fused seamlessly to a heavy-footed, marauding kick drum; later on, Blumenkranz lends an almost *guimbri*-like tone to the cinematic fugue "Monocle." Levin weighs in on the free-form "Chain," his jazzy filigrees and long tones filling out the bottom in calm counterpoint to the sonic chaos around him. On "Nork," bassist **Lorenzo Feliciati** sits in, his fluid and dub-like lines sounding positively Laswellian (yes, I had to use the word).

For his part, Laswell seems content to lay back, but he does sound prominent on the closer, "Piehole," his signature plucked harmonics, fretless slides, and distorted slaps driving the track toward a psychedelic apotheosis. As we await a new Painkiller project (a live compendium from 2005 entitled *The Prophecy*), it's useful to recall how Laswell once referred to himself in these pages as a "finisher" rather than a record producer. Mumpbeak catches fire in the raw freedom of its performances, but what really gives it an insistent burn is the polished consistency of the sound: expertly layered, fine-tuned for depth, and stretched to the brink in the low end. —BILL MURPHY

HELIO PARALLAX
HELIO PARALLAX VOL. 1

[MOD Technologies]

After holding down the low end for Matisyahu, Lee "Scratch" Perry, and Wu-Tang Clan, **Josh Werner** has re-emerged with a new project that spotlights his masterful dub playing and intensely dirty G&L tone. Helio Parallax's first EP features ambient dub tracks centered on Werner's deep synth riffs and rolling lines. The standout bass track, "Another Broken Human," finds Werner migrating to the high register for some melodic and moody licks. —JON D'AURIA

HERB ALPERT
STEPPIN' OUT

[Shout! Factory]

The music mogul/trumpeter's longtime gift for casting great compositions in the latest light has taken on an added dimension over his last three CDs, with the inclusion of his terrific touring band, which features keyboardist Bill Cantos, drummer Michael Shapiro, and bass force **Hussain Jiffry**. Jiffry's muted, spontaneous staccato groove drives a funky cover of the Tijuana Brass smash "The Lonely Bull," while he uses longer tones to lock down "Jacky's Place." Moving to upright, he adds seeing-eye support to fresh harmonic looks at "Europa" and "What'll I Do." Best of all is Hussain's expressive fretless work as a counter-voice to Alpert and his vocalist wife, Lani Hall, on "Skylark" (recast in the relative minor), "I Only Have Eyes for You," the Latin-jazz waltz "Good Morning Mr. Sunshine," and Astor Piazzolla's stirring "Oblivion." —CHRIS JISI

MUSE
LIVE AT ROME OLYMPIC STADIUM (DVD)

[Warner Music]

From the first riff of the powerful opening track "Supremacy," **Chris Wolstenholme** and Muse come out with their guns blazing on this explosively performed and captured concert DVD. The superb-quality sound catches every bit of Wolstenholme's monstrous tone—which says a lot, given the sheer variety of basses he uses throughout the show. And while it's hard to choose a pivotal track, a consensus of bassists would likely pick "Hysteria," which features the lightning-fast, distorted lines that Wolstenholme nails almost effortlessly. From front to back, this video is a must-see for fans of flawlessly executed rock bass. —JON D'AURIA

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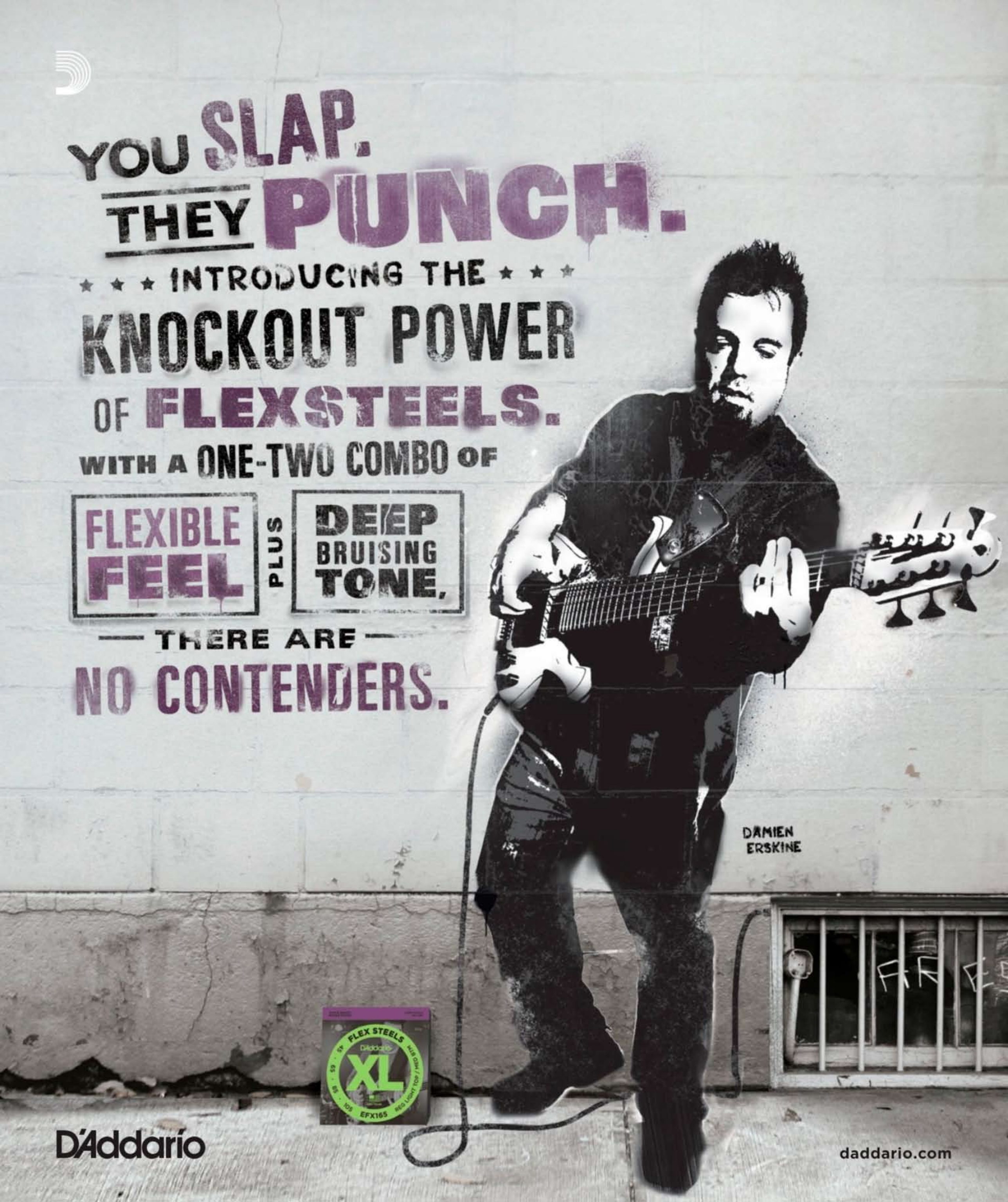
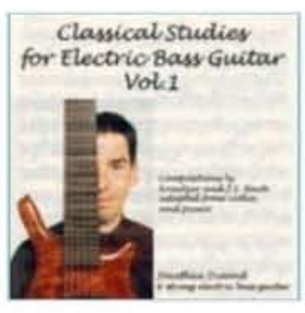


D'Addario
daddario.com

MIMI JONES
BALANCE [Hot Tone Music]
Veteran New York jazz bassist **Mimi Jones** indeed strikes a compelling stylistic balance on her sophomore effort, which launches her new label. Starting on the straightahead side with a bowed-melody reading of the Bob Dorough/Miles Davis collab "Nothing Like You," Jones then grabs her electric bass and vocal mic for her breathy, rock-edged ode to loneliness, "Traveler." And so it goes: The introspective instrumental "Edge of a Circle" flirts with free-form via Mimi's upright solo; Roy Ayers' soul-jazz classic, "Everybody Love the Sunshine," simmers at a slower pace suited to Jones (on electric) and Camille Thurman's stark vocal harmony; a swinging take on the familiar children's tune "The Itsy Bitsy Spider" begins with a dark, creepy-crawly rubato intro. The true gem is a cover of Adele's "Someone Like You," which unfurls with Jones' intimate vocal in counterpoint to her bowed long tones, and features new themes and harmonies each time around. —CHRIS JISI

DAUGHTRY
BAPTIZED [RCA]
After taking a brief moment away from the band, original bassist **Josh Paul** returns to supply the bass on Daughtry's most Southern/folk-influenced album yet. Paul's bass provides the dramatic color to Chris Daughtry's ballads, utilizing open notes and long spaces and letting the low end fill out the bottom range below auto-tuned vocals and acoustic guitar riffs. Although the band seems to be departing from its post-grunge identity, Paul still rocks out when the opportunity arises. —JON D'AURIA



JONATHAN DIMOND
CLASSICAL STUDIES FOR ELECTRIC BASS GUITAR, VOL. 1 [jonathandimond.com]
Bassist and educator **Jonathan Dimond**'s compilation of classical études performed on 6-string bass is a true testament to his work ethic. This is very difficult material, and his technically masterful approach shines through on the 13-track album. With the exception of the Bach Prelude for Piano No. 3, the collection features études from the fabled Kreutzer studies that have plagued violinists and their instructors for generations. While Dimond's articulation, tone, and general execution come close to flawless, bringing life and soul to these juggernauts is a challenging task, and in that respect, he falls short; even with the Bach, his performances border on stiff and mechanical. But for those looking to tackle this repertoire on electric bass, Dimond clearly illuminates the path. —ED FRIEDLAND

SWITCHFOOT
FADING WEST [Atlantic]
San Diego's reigning alternative pop outfit Switchfoot's ninth album is full of power anthems and laid-back beach-inspired songs. **Tim Foreman** takes his usual role of sonic support, favoring simplistic lines on the first single, "Who We Are," and much of the rest of the album. However, on the aptly titled song "Ba55," Foreman pulls out a deviating, deep-pocketed riff that makes it one of the record's best tracks. —JON D'AURIA

ZAC BROWN BAND
THE GROHL SESSIONS, VOL 1 [iTunes]
This iTunes-exclusive, four-song pairing of Foo Fighters' Dave Grohl producing and drumming with country-rock/folk titans the Zac Brown Band has an added bonus in **Oteil Burbridge** on bass (first seen on the Country Music Awards in November). Burbridge, who counts ZBB drummer and former Peacemaker stickman Chris Fryar among his connections to the group, is in fine form via his vintageFender Precision and Gibson EB-2 (both tuned to E♭). On the medium ballads "All Alright" and "The Muse," his seeing-eye bass connects his roots melodically while complementing the vocal lines. The 6/8 lope of "Let It Rain" lets Oteil mine the upper registers for Allman Brothers/McCartney-esque feel-good fills. Finally, the driving boogie of "Day of the Dead" finds Oteil (who wrote about the experience in his blog) in full-on groove mode, first locking down and then taking creative liberties with his part. —CHRIS JISI

BLACK FLAG
WHAT THE ... [SST]
On its first new album in 28 years, legendary hardcore punk band Black Flag returns with a record that pays homage to its '80s glory days, with unrefined instrumentation and vintage production. Founding member **Greg Ginn** (credited as Dale Nixon) covers the bass duties on this record, where he primarily follows the guitar riffs with his fast picking chops. Though the low end is fairly muffled throughout the album, longtime fans should rejoice in this highly anticipated release. —JON D'AURIA **BP**

the PRS

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RED DRAGON CARTEL (JAKE E. LEE), BEGGARS & THIEVES

Ronnie Mancuso

On Dropping Heavy Studio Tones

BY JIMMY LESLIE | PHOTOGRAPH BY FRED MORLEDGE

"A FEW YEARS AGO PRODUCER KEVIN CHURKO BUILT HIS studio next to mine, and we tied them together," explains Ronnie Mancuso, who is currently producing Ron Keel and mixing some tracks for Loudness. The bassist and guitar player always dug the work of Jake E. Lee [Ozzy Osbourne, Badlands], and in 2013 Mancuso lured the monster guitarist out of hibernation into a partnership dubbed Red Dragon Cartel. Mancuso collaborated on songwriting and production and played bass on the high-impact melodic rock outfit's debut. Notable bass cameos include Pantera and Down's Rex Brown on "Slave," and Cheap Trick's Tom Petersson, who brought his 12-string ruckus to the single, "Feeder." Mancuso plays bass on tour.

What is your primary bass, and what makes it the best bass for you?

I still love playing a classic Fender Precision, but if I'm going for a more modern sound I'll use a bass with active pickups, because they seem to cut through better. I've been using the new Fender Jaguar Bass recently because it's sort of a cross between a P-Bass and a Music Man. Its passive pickups have a slightly more modern top end that complements its otherwise meaty, P-style sound.

What do you always consider when you drop a bass track?

I am always concerned that my notes are the same volume regardless of whether I decide to play with my fingers or a pick. When you play straight eighth-notes, you want them tight, even, and just the right length.

How did you capture the heavy-hitting tones on *Red Dragon Cartel*?

I always combine the tightness and impact of a direct signal with the meatiness of an amp. On this record I mainly played a Jaguar Bass through a Waves/PRS Studio Guitar Interface into a Neve 1066 preamp and a Summit tube compressor running three to six decibels of compression.

I utilized three channels in Pro Tools for bass. One was clean. I used Avid's SansAmp PSA-1 plug-in on another that I'd mix in to add dirt and punch. The Waves/PRS unit was designed for guitar and has a gain control, so it goes way beyond a regular direct box for driving plug-ins. I also re-amped the bass through an old Ampeg B-15 and mixed it in just enough to add warmth and depth.

Do you have any words of wisdom for players who are preparing for a recording project?

Always play to a click or a drum machine—always. That's the only way to get true studio chops. When session time comes, forget your ego and play for the song. I try to go over things like transitions and arrangements with no emotion or attitude at all. Just program the computer that is your brain. Once you're ready, take a couple of minutes and a deep breath, and then hit RECORD. Try to play from your subconscious with tons of attitude and confidence, and then lay back in the pocket. **BP**

INFO

LISTEN

Red Dragon Cartel, *Red Dragon Cartel* [Frontiers, 2014]

EQUIP

On *Red Dragon Cartel*:
Basses Fender Deluxe Jaguar Bass, Tom Petersson's custom aluminum 12- string, Schecter Blasko Signature Bass
Strings Various brands (.060, .080, .095, .125)
Rig Vintage Ampeg B-15 Portaflex amp with Gauss speaker

CONNECT

Watch the video for Red Dragon Cartel's "Feeder" featuring Cheap Trick's Robin Zander on vocals and Tom Petersson on 12-string bass. **bassplayer.com/march2014**

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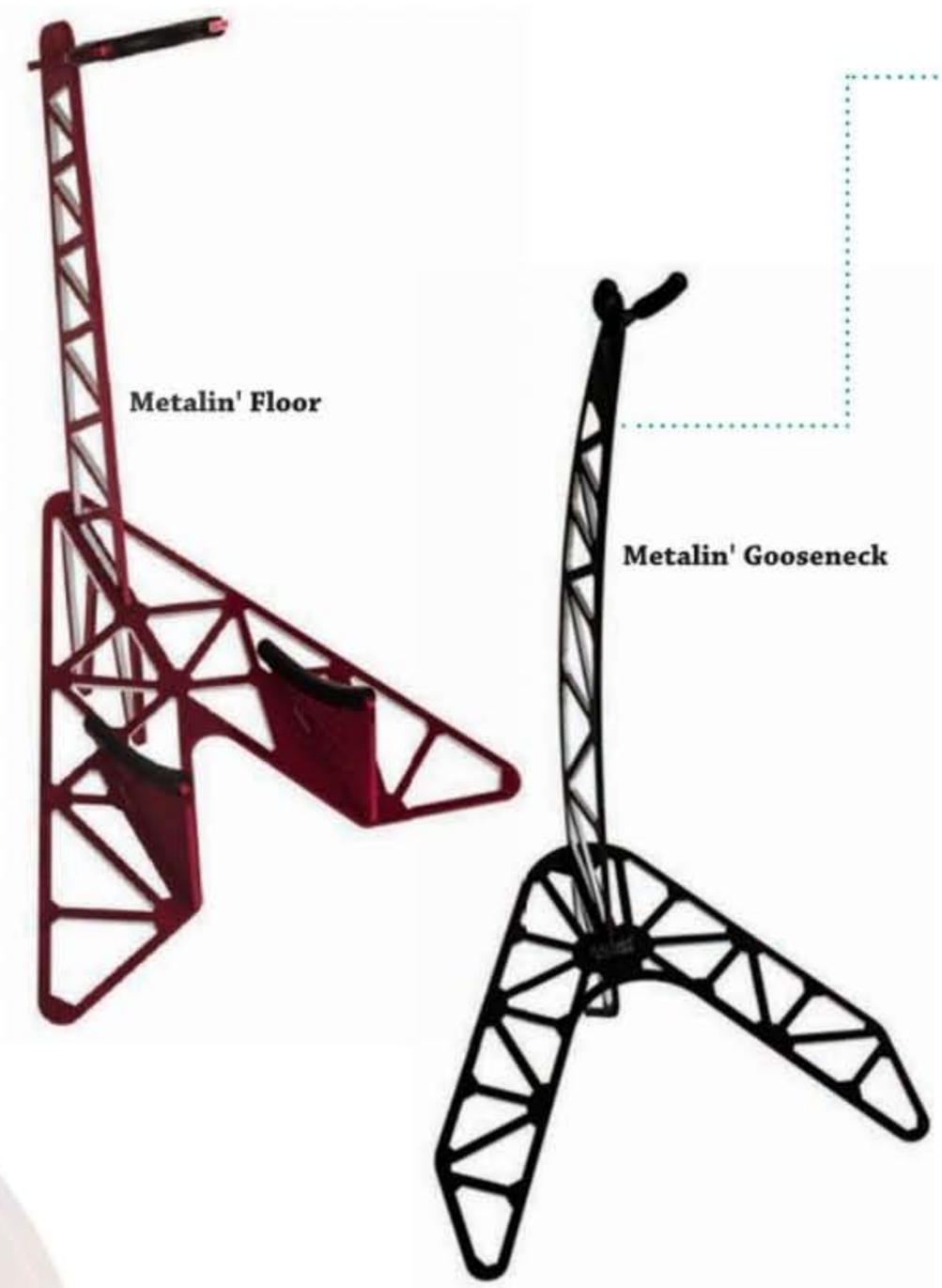

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With its solid mahogany body, mahogany neck, volume/volume/tone controls, 30" scale length, angled headstock, and dual pickups, the SG Special Bass carries the flavor of its famous ancestor. Besides its T-Bird Plus and vintage-style T-Bird mini pickups, the SG Special Bass also boasts max-grip speed knobs, a Graph Tech nut, Grover shamrock-style tuners, and a three-point adjustable bridge. The SG Special Bass's 20-fret rosewood fingerboard features a cool Gibson 120th anniversary banner on the 12th fret. It comes with a vintage brown hardshell case.

Street $700

Contact gibson.com

KALA

Bakithi Kumalo Signature U-Bass

South African legend Kumalo's signature fretless Kala U-Bass features custom Hipshot tuners, a maple neck, GraphTech Black Tusq nut, rosewood fretboard, and a swamp ash body. Like every U-Bass, the electronics are by LR Baggs. The 21"-scale Kumalo, which is available in an espresso brown finish, ships in a custom deluxe gig bag.

List $1,300

Contact kalabrand.com

EC PEDALS

Michael Benson FuzzDriver

Ready to mix and match your fuzz and overdrive? EC Pedals' new FuzzDriver pairs the company's Bass Overlord (with its LEVEL, GAIN, and TONE controls) and Angry Ape Gated Fuzz (LEVEL, TONE, GAIN, and GROWL) effects into one gnarly monster.

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Nate Mendel NM2 Double Distortion

Ashdown's latest Artist series release is a stereo pedal with two separate distortions—each with its own MASTER control, drive mix, and footswitch—that can be used together or routed to different amps. The NM2 also boasts a meter switch that toggles between displaying the clean and dirty signals on its VU meter.

Street $170

Contact ashdownmusic.com

AERO INSTRUMENT

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Available as direct replacement for conventional J-style pickups, Aero Instrument's new JB4 Type 3 pickups feature Alnico 2 magnets in the familiar exposed two-polepiece-per-string arrangement. Custom options available include different string spacing, unexposed polepieces, and soapbar-shaped covers. The JB4 Type 3 pickups can be used in combination with any onboard preamp, although despite being passive, their high output level does not require one.

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4-string

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CHRIS SCHWEGLER / ATLAS ICONS

JOHN MYUNG

SPEAK SOFTLY AND CARRY A BIG STICK

BY E.E. BRADMAN

IT'S ONLY A WEEK INTO 2014, AND NEW YORK CITY IS FROZEN SOLID. AMTRAK stops running. The state declares an emergency. In Central Park, the temperature drops to 4 degrees, breaking a 118-year-old record, and strong winds push the wind-chill factor below zero. New Yorkers, even never-grumble super-tough don't-give-a-hoot get-outta-my-way natives, are ready to escape to Miami.

In at least one home, however, things are warm and sunny. John Myung, the softest-spoken member of one of most shredding bands on earth, is shattering his reputation as the quiet type, and with good

KEN SETTLE

reason. The new Dream Theater album is a return to his prog-rock roots and to the basses and tones that inspired him all those years ago as a kid growing up in Long Island. But it's not just a nostalgia trip. The album's title—simply, *Dream Theater*—also signifies a fresh beginning, a statement, and an affirmation. It's a sign of new life, and Myung is eager to talk about it.

What makes *Dream Theater* all the more fantastic is that barely four years ago, no one knew how things were going to turn out after the sudden exit of longtime drummer Mike Portnoy, with whom Myung and guitarist John Petrucci founded the band in 1985. Over the course of ten studio albums, Dream Theater had gained millions of fans—and with 1992's *Images & Words*, even a touch of commercial success—by perfecting their own mix of over-the-top virtuosity, pop songcraft, epic ballads, and crunchy metal. As acrimonious as Portnoy's departure was, the band—rounded out since the '90s by keyboard wizard Jordan Rudess and vocalist James LaBrie—went right into recording their eleventh album, the suitably titled *A Dramatic Turn of Events*. New drummer Mike Mangini played drum parts written by Petrucci, and despite the circumstances, it earned the band its first Grammy nomination in 2012.

Dream Theater, however, finds the band in rare form. Recalling prog hall-of-famers (Yes, Genesis), pop juggernauts (Led Zeppelin, Queen), Dream Theater's contemporaries (Fates Warning, Queensrÿche), as well as metal and hard-rock monsters (Anthrax, Megadeth)—and reserving a special affinity for Rush—the new album boldly announces that with its deep roots, the band will thrive, not just survive, without its founding drummer. Mangini, unleashed to contribute his own virtuosic parts, lights a new fire under his bandmates, who turn in inspired, epic performances. Fans and critics feel it, too: The album, which landed in the Top Ten in 24 countries and has been nominated for a Grammy, is already considered a highlight of the DT catalog.

For his part, Myung screams out of the gate with a new duo of custom Music Man Bongo basses and a front-pickup grunt that simultaneously recalls Geddy Lee and Chris Squire. Always fleet-fingered, Myung seems energized and up in the mix on every track, grooving with thick overdrive toward the end of "Looking Glass," laying down the law underneath Rudess's solo on "Along the Ride," and throwing down Geddy-like bass breaks underneath the craziness of "Enigma Machine." "Surrender to Reason" finds him flaunting the tone of his Ernie Ball/Music Man Bongo HS, and it's a joy to hear him stretch out while Petrucci solos. "Illumination Theory," the five-part, 22-minute album closer, contains plenty of bass-tastic highlights, including Myung's gritty overdrive and big bottom on "Live, Die, Kill," his counterpoint to Petrucci on "The Embracing Circle," and his cool runs underneath "The Pursuit of Truth," all played with the excitement of teenager who'd one day go to Berklee and then rule the world.

How was the writing process on the new album?

There was definitely a buzz in the air once all the gear was loaded in the studio, and that set the pace for the entire writing process. We visited our influences a bit, and there were lots of fun moments on this album. It's great to be able to feel that way after having spent so much time with it.

What are your favorite tracks?

"Enigma Machine," which has a lot of bass breaks, and "Behind the Veil," which has a cool bass break.

How did you get your tone this time?

My basses have a new element of fire. It all depended on how I played and how much I attacked the strings. If I want more heat in the sound, I really lay in, and if I don't need it, I back off. But equally important is that my bass tone has the round, foundational sound that supports the instruments above. It's great to have a cool sound, but is it also supporting the other instruments? Is it acting as a bass? In that respect, a really good bass sound is one of the toughest sounds to get. When you hear a great bass sound, don't take it for granted, man! There is a lot of work going on—a lot—everything from the gear to the players to the engineers.

> "The tone I have now is the best bass sound I've ever gotten on a Dream Theater album."

For example, when the bass breaks happen in "Behind the Veil" and "Enigma Machine," you get to hear the bass by itself for a moment. The tracks don't drop, and there's no loss of energy. It's just another exciting moment in the song, and then *boom*—the band kicks back in. That's amazing to me. Overall, I think the tone I have now is the best bass sound I've ever gotten on a Dream Theater album.

Which brings me to the question many fans ask: Why is it so tough to hear you during live shows? Can you hear yourself onstage?

Yeah, I'm cranking! Some of it might be that there's a lot going on. There are people who tell me my live bass tone is great, so I think part of it is where you're sitting. It also depends on which tour you're talking about [*laughs*]. On the most recent tours, I'm clearly in the mix. It might actually get a little better because of

Dream Theater (from left): Mike Mangini, John Myung, James LaBrie, Jordan Rudess, and John Petrucci

the fire element I now have.

How do you get your distortion and overdrive tones?

With the Mesa Boogie Grid Slammer and the Fractal Audio Axe-Fx II. I use the Axe-Fx for distortion that I've modeled from my old Pearce BC-1 with a Billy Sheehan mod, and it sounds incredible.

Carving out space between the guitars and the kick drum can be difficult. How do you make that happen?

On a parametric EQ, I'll push anywhere between 160Hz and 240 Hz, and on the mid-frequency side, between 800Hz and 1,000Hz. As long as the instrument itself sounds good, that EQ should work. There are so many options with the gear, but I use most of it in subtle ways, just making little tweaks.

Your outboard gear is pretty serious.

Anybody can go out and buy a rack of great stuff, but it's about finding gear that supports everything else in the rack.

What do you consider the heart of your rack?

My Demeter VTMP-2B valve pre [tube preamp]. It's just a magical piece of gear. James Demeter was telling me how he made one of these for Quincy Jones when he was recording *Thriller* with Louis Johnson, who played a Music Man. And you know what? I was at a TGI Fridays having dinner and "Thriller" came on. I listened to the bass, and I realized that that's exactly what it sounds like—a Music Man bass going through a valve pre. And I'm using Radial technology for all signal routing and things like that, which is top notch. I wouldn't be able to have the creativity that I have with my gear without the Radial stuff. It's so, *Where have you been my whole life?* Amazing high-quality.

What do you look for in your gear?

Many companies make great gear, but it was just a matter of me finding out what works best for the way I play. I have a strong right-hand style that produces a certain attack and "clack" that can either work with me or against me. There are so many options and only so many windows of time to really think about gear. On tour, it's more about having gear that's reliable every night; it's hard to be experimental. And then after the tour, boom—we're back in the studio.

What brought you to Music Man basses?

I started with Music Man and then went to Spector, Tobias, Tung, and then Yamaha—all great companies, all great instruments. But when I played the Bongo bass, John Petrucci was like,

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"Man, that is the you I remember." And he was right; I feel like I'm back again. This is the energy. This is the vibe. This is why I started playing.

What's special about your Bongo basses?

I had two amazing Bongo basses for our recording sessions, and they're both a bit unique. I had a HS [single humbucker] that I was test driving for about a year—the prototype with the neck and everything. And then the other one, an HH [double humbucker], came in after the first song was written.

On the HS, I chose to have just a volume knob, without any EQ. If I want to change anything, I change it with the parametric EQ that's in my rig or have a studio engineer use the EQ in a console.

Why'd you decide not to have tone controls on the bass?

The bass is the first part of the signal chain, so I need to know it's a consistent starting point. I also realized that outboard EQs are way more powerful, so I just let the bass be the bass, and that has seemed to work for everybody.

On the double humbucker, I chose to have a volume control and a 4-way knob that changes the polarity of the pickups. That way, I get a little more color out of the pickups, which I totally love—there are moments on this record where I hear that bass, and I'm like, "Thank God I had that pickup selector in there." I had it set one way throughout the whole record. You can really hear the sound on "Illumination Theory," where there's the middle classical piece, the keyboard piece in the beginning, and then this sort of comet entering back in sonically, which lands with the bass kicking in. That's the double-humbucker Bongo. It has that Rickenbacker-ish kind of sound—it just has all these different worlds in it that you can hear on the record.

Do your Bongo basses have custom neck profiles, too?

Yes. At first, the neck was too taxing on my hands, so I started by superimposing everything on a standard 5-string neck. But I wasn't getting as much power in my left hand as I wanted; I felt like I was cupping the neck the whole time rather than being able to anchor my thumb behind it. I explained all this to Ernie Ball/Music Man, and we made the neck a bit flatter. Now I can get the leverage I need, and my hands are totally comfortable. That's also important when it comes to preventing carpal tunnel—you have to make sure the instrument is spec'd to the way your hands are built.

How do you connect with drummers and think about being part of a rhythm section?

One thing I've learned is there's no wrong or right way to play. As long as the person has an approach, and it speaks to you, it's important to morph with the approach, keep things musical, and tap into the energy between the drums and the bass. I don't have to think about it a whole lot; it just kind of happens.

You played violin before you picked up bass, right?

Yes, my mom enrolled me when I was five. I lost my passion for the instrument around 15 as I got into rock music. I would bring my violin to jams, but there's no way I could compete, so eventually, I gravitated to bass. In a weird way, I think it had an impact in terms of how I organize notes on the bass and how I think of them as shapes.

Why bass?

It had four strings and there was a need for a bass player in my neighborhood. I didn't put a whole lot of thought into it, but it definitely struck a chord with me.

Who were some of your early influences?

I couldn't wait to come home after school and play along to Black Sabbath records. When I was hanging out, we'd be listening to bands like Jethro Tull, Rush, and Yes. I remember staying up listening to Yes at two in the morning trying to figure out "Long Distance Runaround" on bass.

Once you got serious, what was your practice routine?

Back in junior high, John Petrucci and I had an unwritten rule: We didn't leave the house until we'd put in six hours on our instruments. There's a statistic saying that to really be good at anything, you have to put in 10,000 hours. Even as kids, we knew that we had to put the time in.

What was your experience at Berklee?

During the week, we'd spend each day learning, going to classes, talking about music with people we'd met along the way, and then jamming for six hours a night. After growing up on Long Island, I was exposed to all these great people from different parts of the world who were into different music, and that was a real eye-opener. It was a golden time, a great point in my life.

How long were you there?

Just a year. The idea was to go back after summer break, but the way the summer played out, we decided it would be better if we stayed home, put in the time, and got the band up and running. So we gave it a shot.

What's your practice regimen these days?

I spend a lot of my time with the instrument every day just going through basic stuff like playing scales, which helps keep my hands in shape. It's boring, but it's become a part of my life. I do it to feel centered. If I don't, I feel like something's missing.

How do you practice scales?

I see scales as interlocking patterns, and that's how I think about them and practice them. Anytime anybody comes up with a scale, I have to break it down and understand how it relates to the diatonic scale. It's also cool to play along to albums like Rush's *Hemispheres*, which is a lot of fun. There's something that happens when you're playing along to a recording: You're identifying with something you really enjoy, but you're actually playing it in real time, and it's a great way to spend time with your instrument.

You're renowned for your serious warm-ups, too.

There's no replacement for a good warm-up. To me, a warm-up is just about spending at least two hours with the instrument.

What's your warm-up routine?

I like playing scales, and I also have this mindless thing that I do, a combination of drills and riffs that don't project any sort of tonality—they're mechanical things I play as I inch my way up

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the neck. It doesn't matter what notes you play; just make sure you're playing the whole time, slowly warming up the hands. The time spent is more important than what you play. Make sure it's for at least two hours and you should be good.

How do you avoid carpal tunnel and other hand injuries?

The only reason I don't have issues with my hands is that I warm up before every show. I know that if I'm not warmed up, there's no way I can go out there and play the stuff that we do. I'm really territorial with my time before a show.

And afterward?

Once we're done, the band usually has to do a meet-and-greet or get on a bus to the next city.

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What's the best way to transition from 4-string to 6?

I look at a 6-string as a 4 with two extra strings. If you want to play 6-string and you don't feel ready, just pick up a 6 and play the middle four strings. If anything, it's a bit easier because you have that bottom *B* string as a ramp to play off when you're on the low *E*. With four strings, it seems like the shapes have just started and then they stop, but with the extra strings, you can actually see more shapes within the scales. As a bass player, it just makes sense to have a 6-string. Even if you don't use those extra strings all the time, having them is useful just in terms of being able to see shapes.

"As a bass player, it just makes sense to have a 6-string."

Would you ever play a bass with more than six strings?

No, not really. If I heard anything in that range, I would overdub it with another instrument. The 6-string is a good framework in terms of having a creative instrument, so I don't see the need to go beyond that.

What about Chapman Stick and fretless?

I'm really into Chapman Stick, but it's not something I've used a lot in Dream Theater. I used a Chapman Stick on the track "New Millennium," off *Falling Into Infinity*, a while back. The intro is where it really stands out. I love the spirit of that instrument, but I haven't been able to incorporate it into more Dream Theater songs, at least not yet. Maybe there will be a side project or something that I'll do eventually, something that is more in line with that instrument where I can kind of put something together with it.

I have one fretless Ernie Ball/Music Man on tour, and I love it, but that's like a spice thing. I like the way fretless has this singing quality in terms of how the bass notes can move underneath the melody. Playing a melody on a fretless turns even going from one note to the next into a big deal, and it's a lot more expressive. I experimented a bit with fretless on the song "Hollow Years," also on *Falling Into Infinity*.

How do you find inspiration for your bass lines?

A lot of it is stuff I accumulate. So much of my everyday time with the instrument is uneventful, so it takes patience to wait for the moment when that spark of creativity strikes. Sometimes bass lines come when we're jamming; sometimes, when we're all sitting around and I'm kind of experimenting in front of everybody, they'll stop me when they hear something good. Then there's John or Jordan coming in with something they wrote, and it's pretty obvious what I have to do: support what's going on and put the right notes underneath it.

When you're writing an odd-time riff, do you approach it from a rhythmic or melodic perspective?

When I'm creating or trying to come up with something, I try to take everything I've learned, throw it away, and just react. Things just happen because that's what feels right; it has nothing to do with a number. It comes from what Henry Miller called the creative flux, a place in your mind. Afterward, you can break it down, and then you realize, "Wow, there are a lot of cool rhythms going on here."

Do you ever come up with ideas that aren't appropriate for Dream Theater?

Yes, but that's what side projects are for—to be able to use ideas that would otherwise just disappear.

What's next for Jelly Jam?

We're working on songs that we recorded here at my place about a year ago. I hope that will come out soon.

What about an instructional DVD? It's been over a decade since *Progressive Bass Concepts*.

I definitely have stuff to share, but it's really just about being able to find time. Maybe I can get it out in a couple more interviews or maybe another column. We'll see.

Would you ever put out a solo album?

I work best as a collaborator. The type of music I want to play, I can't create alone. When I'm by myself, there's no chemistry—I don't have people pushing me to get more out of myself. Being in a band is unique that way, and I'm thankful for that.

Is there a reason you don't take more solos onstage?

I'm not a solo guy. I play bass to play with people. I don't feel like I have to solo, which is why I don't.

After all these years, what are your favorite Dream Theater songs to play?

There isn't just one that stands out—it's all part of the package. We show up early at the venue and it's just empty seats and us, no energy. During a show, the place is full, and you have all these people transmitting energy. When we play the older catalog now, it's like an energy exchange. The audience is what makes it exciting to play and do what we do, and that's what makes the songs exciting—feeling and transmitting that energy.

When we first started out, there were lots of doubts and worry, but we're still here and still doing it: enjoying what we do, in a band, making music. We're about to embark on an extensive tour and see a lot of different people around the world. It's a really cool situation, and I wouldn't trade it for anything. **BP**

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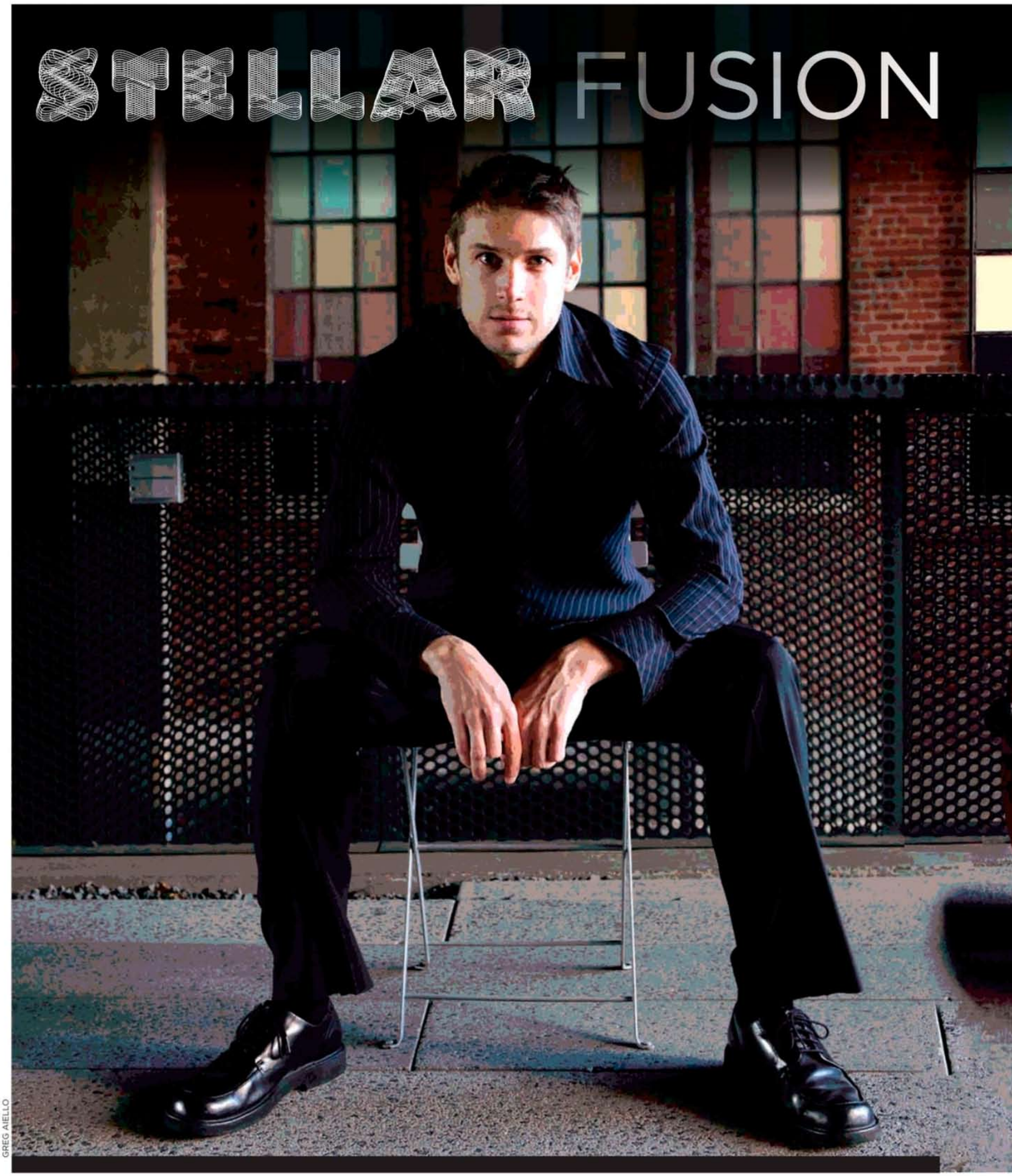
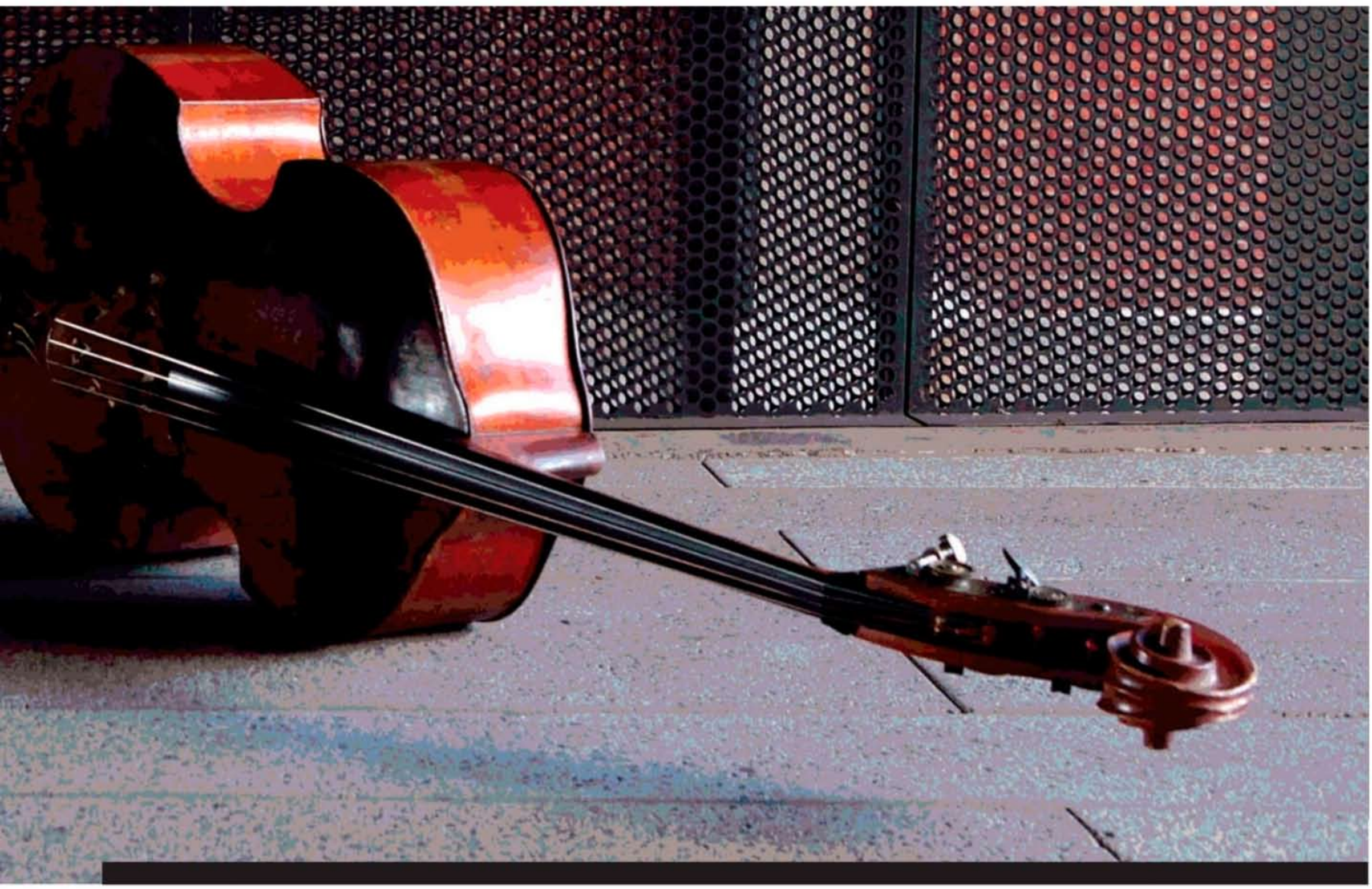


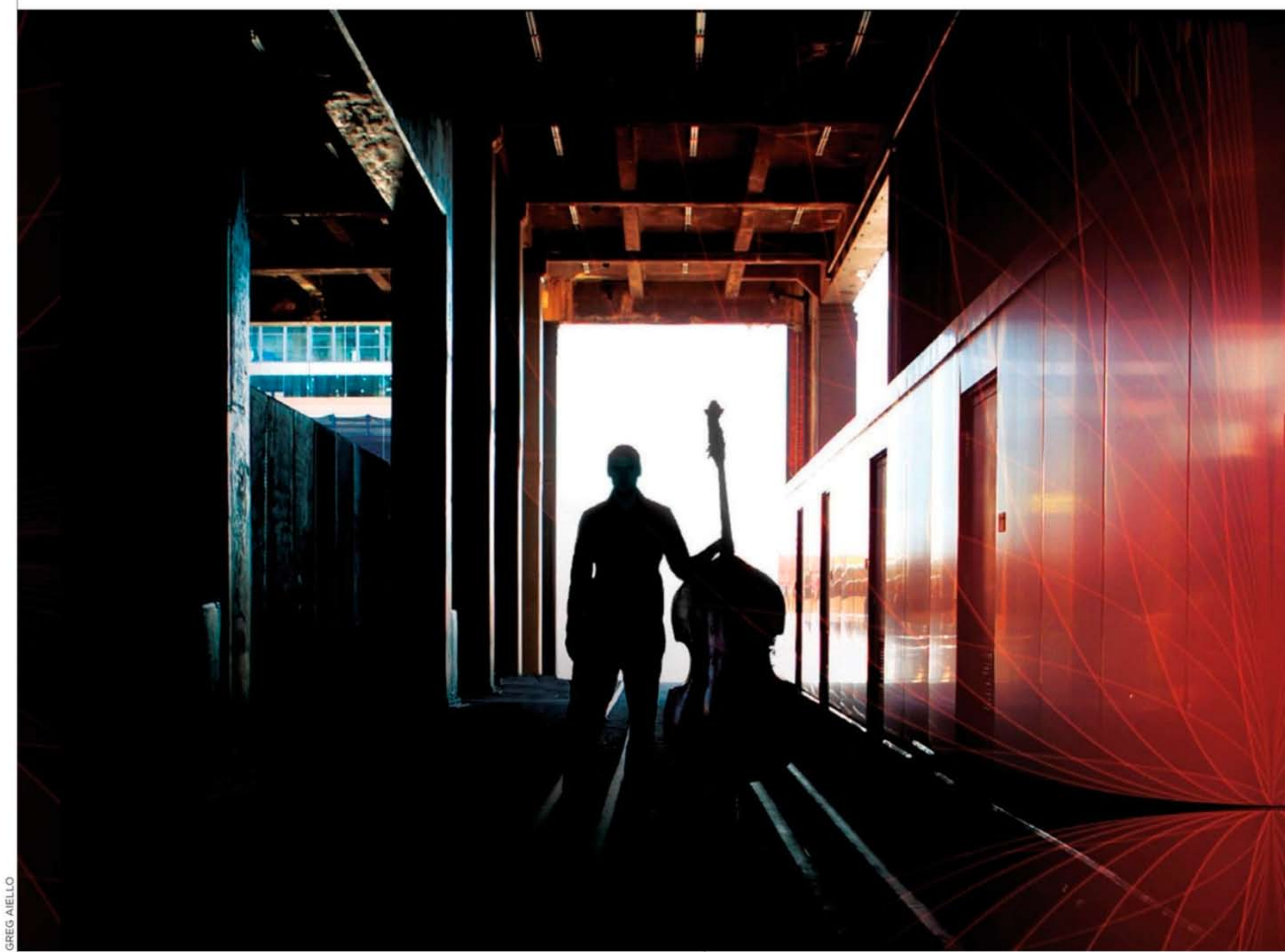
GREG AIELLO

MERGING GENRES AND EXPLORING THE UNCONVENTIONAL,

BEN ALLISON TAKES HIS EVOLUTION TO THE NEXT LEVEL ON *THE STARS LOOK VERY DIFFERENT TODAY.*

BY JON D'AURIA





GREG AIELLO

AS A BASSIST, COMPOSER, AND BANDLEADER, Ben Allison has set himself apart from the New York City jazz pack, where the demand for his singular—often, unconventional—style has led to work on more than 50 albums with a wide array of artists. Ben's talent as a bandleader has propelled him to headline famous stages all over the world, and his dedication to mentoring young musicians and furthering jazz music has led to a position as adjunct professor at New School University, board membership with the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, and a founding role in the Jazz Composers Collective.

Allison kicks convention to the curb on "D.A.V.E.," the opening track of his 11th studio album, *The Stars Look Very Different Today*, building the song around a rhythmic riff strummed on his upright bass with a folded NYC Metro card. Fast forward to "Swiss Cheese D," where Allison pulls his *G* string entirely off the fingerboard and deftly plucks it with his index finger while playing a root-5 pattern with his thumb, achieving a sound that could easily be mistaken for sitar. While Allison's experimentation with technique has become one of his calling cards, his willingness to incorporate genres such as rock, folk, and world music into his jazz compositions shows the fearlessness of his approach to songwriting.

Allison shines the brightest within the unscripted and improvised moments of his music. Working within the quartet format, he is accompanied by guitarist Steve Cardenas [Charlie Haden,

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GREG AIELLO

From left: Allison Miller, Brandon Seabrook, Steve Cardenas, and Ben Allison.

"I ALWAYS PREFER WHEN THERE'S A LOT OF GROUP INTERPLAY, BECAUSE THAT INVOLVES RISK."

Steve Swallow], banjo and guitar player Brandon Seabrook, and drummer Allison Miller, each of whom share Ben's penchant for the unexpected. And while Allison himself may not even know what is coming next, he happily dives into the unexplored and searches for what he can learn from it.

Stylistically, the new album is very different from previous ones.

On every record I try to do something a little different. Every new album is an extension of what I'm thinking and feeling at the time; no matter what I'm doing, I always want to move forward. This one is different because it has a bit of a rock sound, which I've been moving toward the last few albums. There are

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also folk nuances. I love scores and music for film, so I wanted to work off that concept and make film references throughout the songs.

What did you set out to accomplish on bass this time around?

I often try to write things that I sound good playing. That's one of the reasons musicians write to the certain style that pertains to them. I usually don't focus too heavily on making the bass stand out in a soloist way. I don't usually play melodies, and I rarely take extended bass solos on records. That's not really my style. For this album I wanted to create as many textures and as many layers as I could with a quartet.

Why did you opt for a quartet?

I always prefer when there's a lot of group interplay, because that involves risk. When you're playing with other musicians, you never know what they're going to feed you, or what they're going to make you react to. True jazz musicians aren't afraid of what's coming next; they actually perform best when it's spontaneous. You can't be afraid as a musician.

"IF THE GUITAR AND DRUMS HAD A BABY, IT WOULD BE A BASS."

So much of your music relies on improvisation and unscripted moments. How do you approach these?

It depends on the tune, because some songs have dynamic space that we've thought about in advance. You really have to be in the right headspace, and you can't be worrying about anything. Like any good conversation, you pick a topic, which in this case would be the tune, and then you just see where the conversation goes. Because it's a performance, you're trying to keep the conversation flowing and concise enough to where it doesn't become a rant. I write all sorts of landmarks into the tunes so the players can reference where we are at anytime and it will pull them back in. It's all about listening and reacting.

What are some of your unusual playing techniques?

There are hundreds of them, and I'm always exploring for new ones. Even adjusting where you place your right hand and how you pluck the strings can make a big different in your tone. You can angle your right hand downward a certain way to the fingerboard to make the string jump up, or you can cross the fingerboard or you can wrap your finger around the string and flip it upward. On the left hand, sometimes I hold my fingers down really hard so that I get a long sustain, other times I lift it up quickly so that the note is cut off. I've been known to take solos where I don't even press the string all the way down to the fingerboard, which gives it almost a box drum or muted marimba sound. Sometimes I even pick with three fingers on my right hand in a way that a classical guitarist would.

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JIMMY KATZ

And how would you describe your typical finger work?

A symphony conductor recently come up to me after a performance and said he had never seen anyone with technique like mine, which I didn't know how to interpret. But he clarified by saying that my hands are really collapsed, though my intonation is perfect. There's a classical technique that I struggled to learn early on in my career that I eventually gave up because it hurt so badly, and I realized that's the last thing you want to do. So I developed my own personal technique. That made me come to the conclusion that you can approach technique in a classical sense where there is a certain way of holding the bass and everyone is supposed to subscribe to those technical principles because it gives you great command over your instrument. However, my definition of technique is more abstract, and that is: Whatever gives you the ability to get out what's in your heart and your head through your fingers is best.

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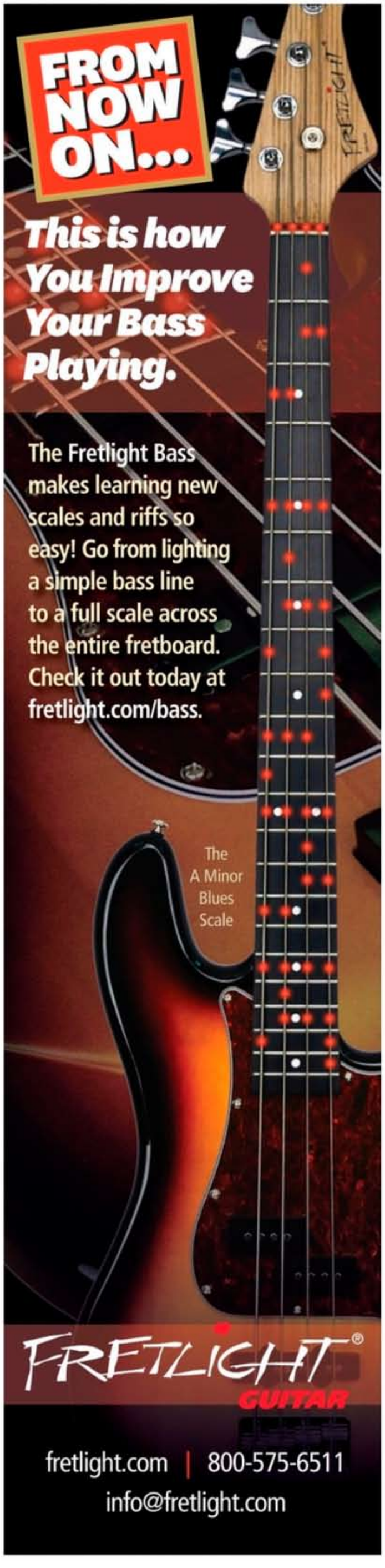

What was your recording method for your upright bass?

I used two mics on the bass itself, and then I used one microphone on a 1x12 amp that was kept in a booth. This gave me different pieces of tonal character that I could mix in and out depending on the track. It was pretty much three inputs for each song. Each of the mics had different characteristics, especially the ones on my bass. One got a lower sound below the bridge, and the other was higher up near the neck so I'd get more of my string sound.

What led you to play the bass?

When I started as a musician, I played hand drums, drum kit, and guitar. I loved all three, but I felt in high school that I had to focus on one or the other. That's when I picked up the electric bass for the first time and the acoustic shortly after. To me, it felt like if the guitar and drums had a baby, it would be a bass. You have the percussive quality of a drum set and then the harmonic capabilities of a guitar. I do tend to think of my bass having drum-like qualities.

So why did you choose the upright specifically?

The sheer amount of sounds you can get out of upright has always drawn me to it. There are so many ways you can alter your sound naturally because of its many timbers and textures. Compared to my experience with electric bass—and I love electric bass—I felt like I could get many more options on acoustic.

How different are electric and upright basses in your opinion?

It's a totally different instrument; you cannot think of the electric bass and the acoustic bass in the same realm. Aside from the fact that they share a similar role in a band, they're technically very different. I had a learning curve for sure to adjust to the upright, but that's true of any instrument. I pity trumpet players, because it can six months before you can even get a note to sound like anything. Having experience with guitar and electric bass definitely helped me get accustomed to it.

What have been the biggest strides in your playing to this point?

I've definitely become more confident and comfortable with getting what I hear out through my fingers quickly and without hesitation. Hopefully I've gained a lot of control, which is what we want as musician's right? Once you gain better control, then you move on to learn the subtleties of the genre you're playing in and its dialect. I started my first professional gig playing with a salsa band in high school, and I had to learn the salsa language and the feel of those grooves. It's simple music on one hand, but it also has difficult intricacies like reggae. You can't just play a reggae line well without possessing the feel. If you are a practiced musician and you have control over your instrument, then it's not so insurmountable of a task to learn a new genre. So much of it comes from playing with as many good musicians as you can, and never losing your desire to try new things. **BP**

"ONCE YOU GAIN BETTER CONTROL, THEN YOU MOVE ON TO LEARN THE SUBTLETIES OF THE GENRE YOU'RE PLAYING IN."

INFO

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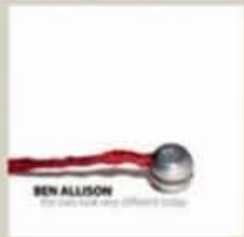

Ben Allison, *The Stars Look Very Different Today* [Sonic Camera, 2013]

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Fender Starcaster, Coronado & Guild Starfire Basses

BY ED FRIEDLAND

AS A MUSICAL PLATFORM, THE SHORT-SCALE SEMI-hollow bass has launched some amazing performances. From Rivoli-steeped British blues, to Starfire-fueled Bay Area psychedelia, to EB-2-injected proto-jazz/rock fusion, the 30"-scale axe has rightfully earned its seat at the "real bass" table. This trio illustrates the broad spectrum of what the genre offers, each with its own distinct personality and voice. The Coronado is a reissue of Fender's first semi-hollow bass, while the Starcaster is a model that never quite made it to market in 1976. The Guild Starfire is a faithful rendering of a classic, and coincidentally, also a Fender product. Whether you simply want an alternative voice in your arsenal, or you're looking for a main axe that breaks the mold, this species of instrument has many charms, and this trio of shorties opens up the playing field considerably.

Fender Starcaster Bass

Fender Coronado Bass
Guild Starfire Bass

CORONADO BASS

An early product of Fender's then newly-seated CBS management, the original 1966 Coronado bass did not catch on in a big way, and production was halted in 1971. The first Coronados were fully hollow-bodied, making them more prone to feedback, but the reissue features a semi-hollow body with maple top and back, and like the Starcaster bass, an alder tone block into which the pickups and bridge are mounted. The bolt-on maple neck has 21 medium-jumbo frets pressed into a bound rosewood fingerboard with pearloid block inlays. The "C"-shaped neck profile and 9.25" fingerboard radius feels instantly recognizable, and the tinted gloss-polyester finish gives the slightly oversize headstock a vintage look. The DeArmond single coils of the original are replaced with a set of FideliTron humbuckers (a Gretsch-like pickup also found in Fender's Cabronita Precision), with individual volume and tone and a 3-way toggle switch. The carved wooden "F" logo tailpiece remains unchanged, and while the two-point floating bridge is less architecturally interesting than the original's, it's functional and solidly anchored into the tone block. The top strap button is mounted to the body at the neck heel, but the weight of the body and shorter neck allow the bass to sit comfortably without neck-dive. This instrument is part of Fender's Modern Player line, and is "Crafted in China."

STARCASTER BASS

In 1976, Fender released a short-lived, semi-hollow guitar model that has since developed a cultish following. While a few early prototype bass models were said to have been built, they never made it to the market—making the new Starcaster bass more of a reanimation than a reissue. The Chinese-built addition to the Modern Player series sports two massive Fender "Wide Range" humbuckers, with separate volume and tone and a 3-way toggle switch. The bolt-on maple 22-fret neck has a 9.5"-radius maple fingerboard. The smurfy headstock and offset body shape give the Starcaster a distinctive look, and the top strap button's placement makes the bass hang more like a solidbody. The Fender Hi-Mass bridge is a non-traditional choice for this type of instrument, but it eliminates some of the string-length issues that can pop up with floating bridge/tailpiece designs, and it also contributes to clarity and sustain.

STARFIRE BASS

The new Starfire bass, part of Guild's Newark St. Collection, is a well-done tribute to an instrument that is iconic in its class. Introduced in 1965, the original Starfire was Guild's first electric bass, and it featured technology imported from Swedish guitar manufacturer Hagstrom. Powered by the now-legendary Bi-Sonic pickup, and sporting a bridge/tailpiece assembly that looks like it came off a 1960 Volvo, the Starfire had its own voice. The reissue features a single Guild Bi-Sonic pickup in the original bridge position; later models placed it in the neck position,

SPECIFICATIONS

FENDER

CORONADO BASS
Street $750
Pros Cool looks, well balanced tone
Cons May not accept all string brands
Bottom Line The Coronado brings back Fender's first hollowbody design with improved performance.

Contact fender.com

SPECS

Construction Bolt-on
Body Laminated maple with alder tone block
Neck Maple, "C" profile
Neck width at nut 1.625"
Fingerboard Bound rosewood, pearloid block inlays
Frets 22
Pickups Fender FideliTron Humbuckers
Controls Individual volume & tone, 3-way toggle switch

SPECIFICATIONS

FENDER

STARCASTER BASS
Street $750
Pros Massive bottom, versatile, hangs comfortably
Cons None
Bottom Line The Starcaster bass is a flexible tone monster with a unique look.

Contact fender.com

SPECS

Construction Bolt-on
Body Laminated maple with alder tone block
Neck Maple, "C" profile
Neck width at nut 1.625"
Fingerboard Maple
Frets 22
Pickups Fender Wide Range Humbuckers
Controls Individual volume & tone, 3-way toggle switch

SPECIFICATIONS

GUILD

STARFIRE BASS
Street $1,100
Pros Classic replica, clear tone
Cons Pickup placement may not suit everyone
Bottom Line The Starfire bass is a righteous tribute to Guild's first bass.

Contact guildguitars.com

SPECS

Construction Set neck
Body Laminated Mahogany with tone block
Neck Three-piece mahogany/maple, vintage soft "U"
Neck width at nut 1.5"
Fingerboard Rosewood
Frets 21
Pickup Guild Bi-Sonic Humbucker
Controls Volume, tone

and there were two-pickup models built as well. Like the original, the Starfire has a slightly longer 30.75" scale, and has an archtop laminated-mahogany body and mahogany neck, with 21 frets embedded in a rosewood fingerboard. A set-neck design is classic for this type of instrument (the Guild is the only one of the trio with that construction). The neck is glued into the body, which is said to offer the sustain of neck-through-body construction with some of the punch associated with a bolt-on neck. The bridge is a somewhat rustic yet effective apparatus, with individually adjustable rosewood string saddles that gave the Starfire a big advantage in the intonation department. The dual finger-rests are another holdover from the original; they come in handy for plucking-hand placement in the absence of a neck pickup. This Korean-built reissue has a refined feel, and comes with a higher price tag than its two Chinese siblings.

TONE TEST

If you're accustomed to solidbody basses, the semi-hollow design will require a bit of adjustment—not only to the shorter scale length, but also to the dimensions of the instrument itself. The larger bodies are typically bound, with hard right angles where your plucking hand passes over the side. There is no "belly cut" in the back, and in many cases the reach for the lowest positions may be longer, despite the shorter scale length. It will take some experimenting to find the ideal strap height, but realize that a short-scale bass will never hang like your P-Bass. Out of the review basses, the Guild has the most traditional build of the three, with its set neck extending almost a full 2" farther than the Coronado. Beyond the reach for low *F*, the greater length of the unsupported neck gives the bass a more delicate feel. The two bolt-on Fenders have shorter reaches, mostly due to the bridge placement, but the necks both join the body at the 15th fret as opposed to the 16th fret on the Guild.

The first step in my testing was to ditch the factory roundwound strings. Sure, you can play a semi-hollow short-scale bass with roundwounds, but I wont. In my opinion, to bring out the earthy thump, organic acoustic quality, and mellower attack that I look for in these instruments, flats are the way to go. I put a set of D'Addario Chromes on the Starcaster and Starfire, and attempted to put DR Legends on the Coronado, but the hole in the Coronado's tailpiece was too narrow to accept the slightly fatter Legend *E* string, even after shaving off the silk wrapping—so the factory strings stayed on.

The Starcaster's Wide Range humbuckers make it the loudest of the three—the neck pickup in particular is a real earth-mover! Its fat, dub-ready tone would suit many applications, but if you need more articulation, simply flip the toggle switch and use both pickups for slightly less boom and more clarity. The bridge pickup is super-tight and punchy for solos, but I would probably not try to drive the bus from that position. The Starcaster hangs on the strap fairly well; it felt the most like a "normal" bass to me. The combination of the bolt-on neck and maple fingerboard give the bass an unmistakable Fender-ish vibe, but the tone is more in line with a Gibson EB-3 than anything Leo Fender ever built.

The Coronado has an undeniable visual appeal, with the shorter horns and Fender-like headstock creating a neat hybrid of earmarks. The review bass was surprisingly heavy, clocking in at ten pounds, but the weight distribution kept the instrument from neck diving, a common bane of semi-hollow players. The FideliTrons have less output than the Wide Range humbuckers, but the decrease in thunder makes the Coronado a more balanced-sounding instrument. The bound rosewood board and pearloid block inlays are a deluxe touch that gives the Coronado a classy feel, and the rounded "C" neck profile feels right at home.

With a street price $350 more than its Fender counterparts, the Guild Starfire definitely feels like a finer instrument, partially a result of the set-neck construction. The Bi-Sonic pickup is loud and proud and surprisingly full-range, but Guild's decision to go period-correct with the bridge placement means you have to add lows to get some balls. While the pickup placement lets you retain note clarity even when cranking the lows at the amp, the instrument lacks the boom factor of the other two. The tone is distinct and clear, and with more "classical"-sounding strings like Thomastik Infeld Jazz Flats, you could easily coax a very musical, acoustic-type sound from it. For my taste, I would have preferred to see this pickup in the neck position, or even better, to have two pickups. But, the Starfire reissue is a cool instrument that nails the original's vibe.

I would be hard pressed to pick out a favorite of the bunch, as each had qualities that I liked. The Starcaster has the biggest tone—capable of flattening a city block with one note—while the Coronado may be the most versatile and balanced of the three. The Starfire is a real beauty, with classic looks and a luxurious feel, but it's a tad sonically limited. In a perfect world, I would take all three—and in this price range, it's not inconceivable. **BP**

Ampeg V-4B, SVT-112AV & SVT-212AV

BY BRIAN FOX

AFTER ITS DEBUT IN 1969, THE 300-WATT AMPEG SVT (Super Vacuum Tube) quickly became a gold standard for high-powered stage gear. Originally marketed as a multi-purpose amplifier for guitar, bass, and anything else that needed a tremendous amount of volume, the SVT was especially attractive to bassists, as lower frequencies require considerably more power to amplify than high frequencies. By 1974, Ampeg turned its focus on bass players for the SVT, and the rest is history. Flying somewhat below the radar, the original Ampev V-4B was released in 1971 and featured the same preamp as the SVT, but with a 100-watt power amp. While the SVT has maintained its position as the one of the all-time stage amps—especially for the rock set—the V-4B has nonetheless earned a smaller, yet devoted following of players and collectors. With its period-appropriate looks, all-tube construction, and matching 1x12, 2x12, and 8x10 cabinets Ampeg's reissue V-4B is sure to make some heads spin.

If there is a single contributing factor limiting the appeal of an amp as celebrated as the SVT, it is certainly its weight; at 80+ pounds, the SVT is a beast to haul. Taking the preamp guts of the SVT and packing it into a 100-watt, 41-pound package, the V-4B is certainly appealing on paper. But is there any "there" there? Plugged into the matching SVT-212AV cabinet, the V-4B promptly and proudly pumps out the kind of round sound Ampeg has built its brand upon. The V-4B's tone controls are straightforward, with three bands of EQ with switchable mids and ULTRA LO and ULTRA HI switches. By riding the GAIN and VOLUME controls,

SVT-112AV

SVT-212AV

there's actually a considerable range of tones at the fingertips, from creamy and beefy to honky and ornery.

Some would say a tube amp sounds best when cranked. Crank an SVT to the max, and you'll soon be bleeding out your earholes. Not so with the V-4B. On a few loud rock rehearsals—with GAIN and VOLUME set just past noon, the V-4B easily and willingly doles out the kind of creamy overdrive the best stompboxes can only approximate. The beauty

SPECIFICATIONS

AMPEG

V-4B
Street $1,300
Pros Delicious all-tube tubbiness; righteous grind when pushed hard
Cons Limited clean headroom in high-volume applications
Bottom Line Ampeg's SVT may be the gold standard for high-powered tube heads, but the V-4B is a worthy counterpart for those who don't need gobs of clean headroom.

SVT-112AV
Street $500
Pros Light and compact, can keep up on its own with the V-4B at moderate volumes
Cons 4Ω impedance makes for an imbalanced load when paired with the 8Ω SVT-212AV

SVT-212AV
Street $700
Pros In size and configuration, the ultimate match for the V-4B.
Cons Larger than some other 2x12 cabs, but hardly unwieldy.
Bottom Line The throaty character of custom Eminence 12" speakers in both 1x12 and 2x12 cabs makes for tasty tone when coupled with the big booty of the V-4B.

Contact ampeg.cpm

SPECS

V-4B
Power rating 100 watts
Tube complement (3) 12AX7, (1) 12AU7, (4) 6L6GC
Inputs 0 dB, -15 dB
Front panel controls GAIN, BASS (+13dB/-12dB @ 40Hz), ULTRA LO (+2dB @ 40Hz, -11dB @ 500Hz), MIDRANGE (+11dB/-21dB), midrange frequency selector (220Hz/800Hz/3kHz), TREBLE (+14dB/-17dB @ 4kHz), ULTRA HI (+7dB @ 8kHz), VOLUME
Back panel ¼" PREAMP OUT, ¼" POWER AMP IN, ¼" SLAVE OUT, XLR BALANCED OUT, Ground lift
Speaker jacks (2) 2Ω, (2) 4Ω, (1) 8Ω
Weight 41 lbs
Made in China

SVT-112AV
Power handling 300 watts
Drivers 1 x 12" custom Eminence LF, 1" compression driver
Rear panel Two ¼" input/output jacks, 3-way HF Horn switch (off, -6dB, 0dB)
Frequency response 70Hz–18kHz
Impedance 8Ω
Dimensions 24" x 17" x16"
Weight 45 lbs
Made in China

SVT-212AV
Power handling 600 watts
Drivers 2 x 12" custom Eminence LF, 1" compression driver
Rear panel Two ¼" input/output jacks, 3-way HF Horn switch (off, -6dB, 0dB)
Frequency response 71Hz–18kHz
Impedance 4Ω
Dimensions 24" x 25" x16"
Weight 66 lbs
Made in China

of an amp like the V-4B lies in the dynamics; whereas the best solid-state amps are transparent and unwavering, there's an element of danger in the V-4B. Push it hard, and it'll howl. But pull back, and it cleans up quite nicely. I found there to be a bit of a learning curve with the V-4B; as I climbed in volume, the tone controls seemed to increase in sensitivity, and what were once subtle frequency bumps at moderate volume suddenly became extreme. Simply put, Ampeg's V-4B is a blast to *play*. With its old-school vibe, dynamic performance, and massive fun factor, the once-niche V-4B cult is bound to get a big ol' bump in 2014. **BP**

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Hybrid Horizons

Inside The New Fodera/Anthony Jackson Presentation II Contrabass Guitar

BY CHRIS JISI

ANTHONY JACKSON'S DOGGED DETERMINATION TO REALIZE (AND LATER, STANDARDIZE) HIS dream instrument, the 6-string contrabass guitar, survived early detractors. Reluctant builders, closed-minded producers and engineers, and doubting peers—not to mention numerous fiscal and design dead ends—threatened to end the vision. That all changed upon Jackson's teaming with Fodera Basses in 1986. But while the 27-year union has led to a half-dozen successful instruments, including "No. 10," which Anthony has played exclusively since 1996, he has maintained his tireless focus when it comes to refining, improving, and evolving his invention. The same can be said of Fodera founders and builders Vinny Fodera and Joey Lauricella and partner Jason DeSalvo. So when this talented, titanium-grade think tank set out to create a new Fodera/Jackson Presentation model, musical and technological boundaries were sure to be challenged, stretched, and redefined. We headed over to Fodera's shop in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, to get an inside look at the new Fodera/Jackson Presentation II.

Anthony, what led you to decide it was time for a new contrabass guitar?

Anthony Jackson I got very lucky with No. 10, which I've played longer than any other instrument—17 years. [*Note: No. 7, in 1988, was the first Presentation model.*] I learned a great deal about the correct way to design and enhance the instrument. But then a time comes when you can't make an improvement by simply turning a screw a quarter of an inch—bigger things have to happen, and you start to feel a burning inside about some kind of successor. While trying to put a few ideas on paper, Vinny told me he'd like to try to build a full hollowbody version, one that would keep all the best qualities of my solidbody Presentation model, but add more of an acoustic character.

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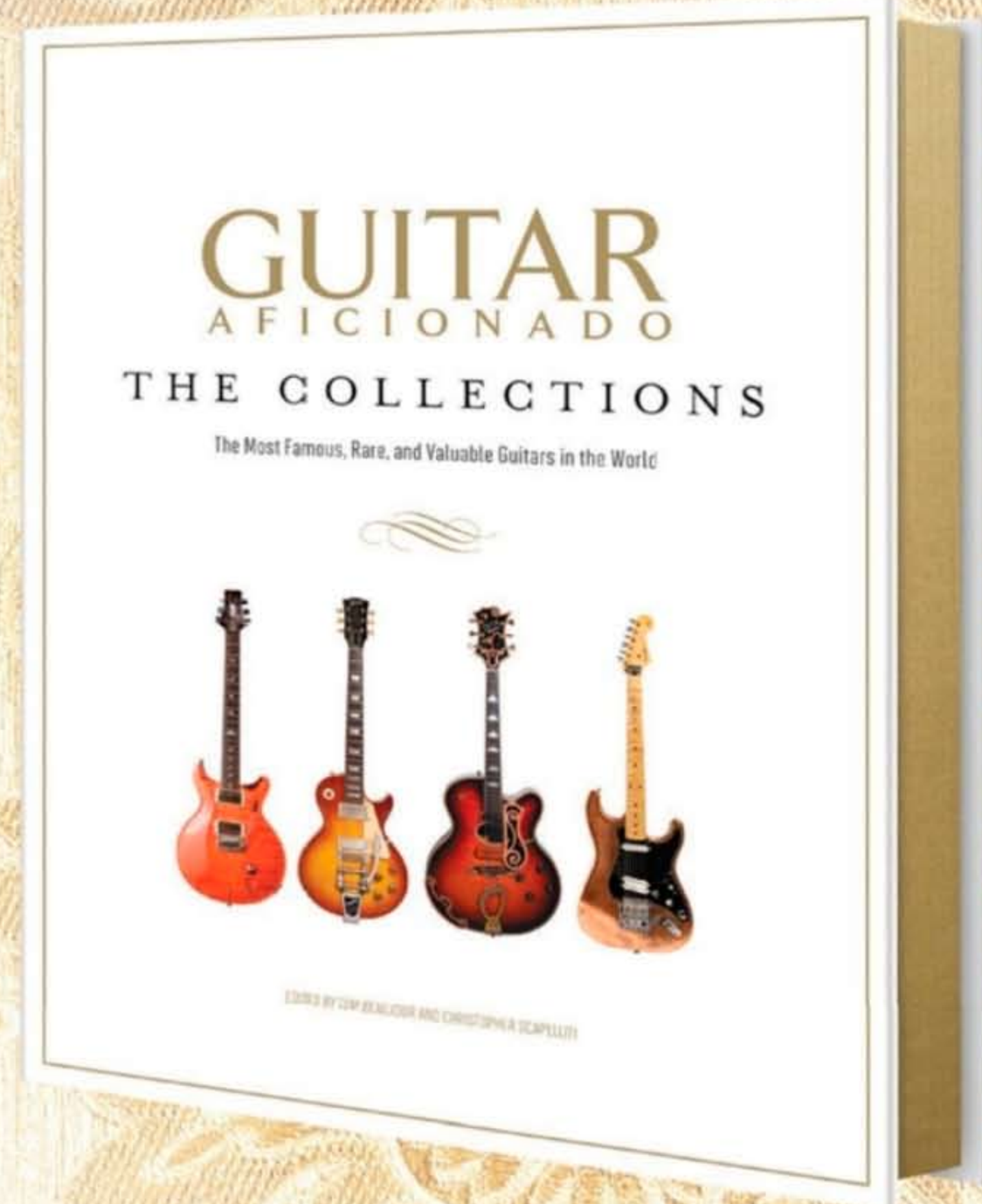

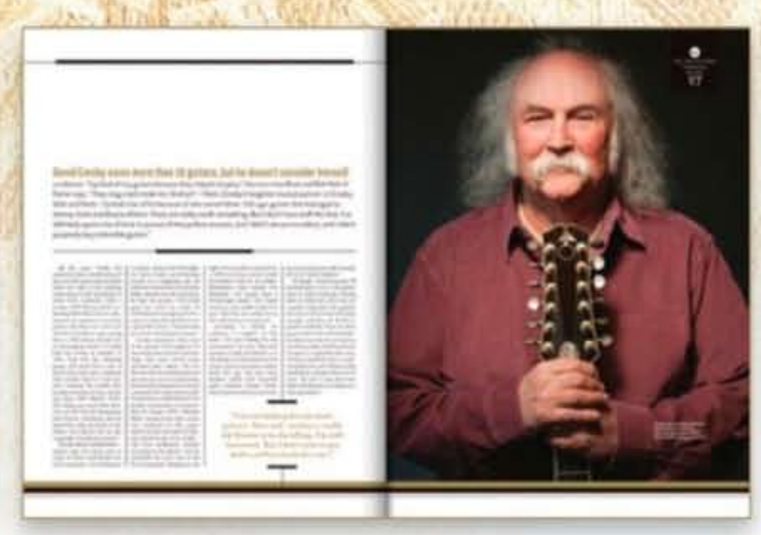

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GUITAR
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Regarding the simple but elegant hand-carved holly top, Jackson says, "What inspires me more is simplicity—simple materials superbly selected and tastefully finished. That goes back to the instrument having no preamp circuit and one properly placed pickup. I want the fanciness to come when I play it and you hear it."

Vinny had the idea to chamber No. 10 to get a bit more wood sound from the air vibrating in the chamber, and it is more resonant than Numbers 7, 8 and 9, but it's not a substitute for a full hollowbody.

What was the main challenge?

AJ To get both the wooden, warm, resonant sound of an acoustic instrument with the response, eveness, sustain, and string sound of a solidbody. If you think of a cello, the resonance occurs when energy from the string is conducted into the body; the body resonates and draws energy out of the string. If you can continually feed energy into the string, as you do with a bow, then sustain is no problem. But if you pluck a note, pizzicato-style, it dies right away. The body is so resonant it doesn't allow the energy of the plucked string to keep the body vibrating. I'm a sustain fanatic, so we needed this instrument to have enough sustain to satisfy me, while still having a clearly discernable wooden character. To achieve a balance between the two was a very difficult, expensive, long process; and while it is a compromise, it's a glorious compromise.

What was your reaction when you first played it in the shop, and then on a gig with Mike Stern soon after?

AJ I knew instantly it was a successful design, which was both a sense of relief and a major victory. The Stern gig was when I was able to really relax, because that was the full-out doctorate exam, and it passed with flying colors; it was amazing! It had a richer, more complex sound than anything I've heard in a bass guitar. It's louder, especially in the middle and upper register; the sound carries as beautifully up there as it does down low. When you go farther up the neck, the strings get thicker and shorter, and normally their ideal characteristics go away. On this instrument—especially on the middle four strings in from the 8th to 14th frets, but all the way up—the notes retain their sweet, rich character and touch and sustain. Coupled with the heel-less access, it never feels or sounds like you're nearing the end of the fingerboard. Overall, the sound of wood is there, as is the sound of a steel roundwound string, but it's richer than that; it's the sound of the wood and metal together, which was the goal.

You've since used it on tour with the Michel Camilo Big Band and on recordings with Wayne Krantz and with Mike Stern and Jeff Richman.

AJ I've officially retired No. 10, and I've been traveling with the Presentation II. That has required a bit of tweaking, as the instrument is still breaking in, on its way to stabilizing eventually. The main adjustment factor for me is the neck. It's the biggest I've ever played, but the sound and consistancy make it worth my while. I had my Meyer Sound system with Michel, which gave me my truest live sound, and the studio session for Mike Stern and Jeff Richman, in particular—where the instrument was optimally set up—was very revealing. I went straight to the board, and no EQ was used on the tracks. The Presentation II had excellent definition, with a very strong but tight bottom end, and lots of sustain

SPECIFICATIONS

FODERA

ANTHONY JACKSON PRESENTATION II
Instrument type 6-string contrabass hybrid
Scale length 36"
Body size 14" wide, 4" thick
Neck width 2.31" at nut; 4.06" at end of fingerboard
Frets 28
Finish Acrylic gloss
Pickup Seymour Duncan Dual Coil
Strings Fodera Anthony Jackson Signature Set
Other Titanium tuners, D-tuner, bridge, and trussrod

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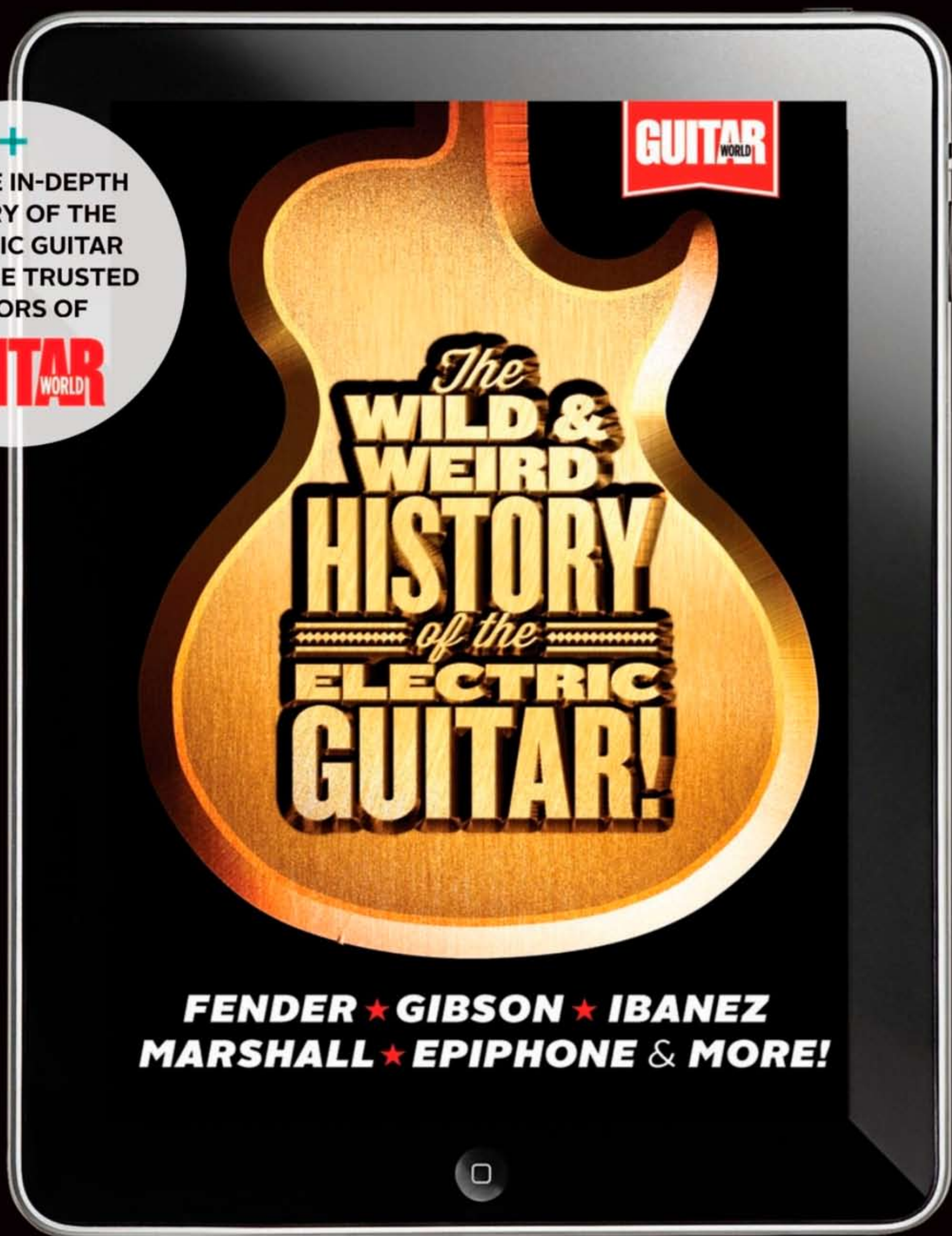

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and wood. It was successful playing it with fingers and very successful using a pick; there was no sense of thinness or excessive brightness. It balanced beautifully. All of the musicians, especially the ones whom I work with regularly, have noticed the difference immediately.

Going forward, what are your thoughts?

AJ The Presentation II is definitely a handful, an armful, a lapful. But if the effort is put in, it will give you back so much capability as a performing artist. The timing was right for what Vinny, Joey, Jason, and I envisioned; the fact that Fodera allowed me to indulge my wildest ideas is absolutely spectacular. It's without doubt a major achievement in my life, secondary only to my highpoints as a player.

From top left: Vinny Fodera, Joey Lauricella, Jason DeSalvo, and Anthony Jackson.

Vinny, what led you to think about this kind of design?

Vinny Fodera Matt Garrison approached me in 2006 about a hollowbody bass for some projects that he thought would benefit from a more acoustic-sounding instrument. That sparked the idea. Matt required a short-scale bass, with a small, thin body, and electronics onboard. We all liked the results, and it led me to think I could apply some of the principles to Anthony's Presentation series. We agreed to go forward with a 36"-scale hybrid that a longtime client ordered, essentially funding the idea and understanding it would be a prototype. The bass was very close to hitting the mark, except the body was a little too wide for Anthony; he asked for the third hybrid [counting Garrison's bass] to have the same body profile as his No. 10 solidbody, and I changed the internal structure accordingly, with even better results. Anthony likens it to going from an upright piano to a grand piano; it's very piano-like and very responsive, with a rich, round, deep tone, yet it has the quick feel, reaction, and articulation you get from a solidbody. Other than the one passive pickup to amplify the strings, the instrument's tone is purely intrinsic.

What can you offer about your proprietary bracing and neck joint?

VF The bracing is something we want explore more before we discuss it. The design will get out there soon enough for players and builders to examine, which is fine. We deliberately kept the body a closed, sealed box, with no *f*-holes or ports, so the bass wouldn't feed back at high volume. With so much air inside and with this type of bracing, you

JOEY LAURICELLA

The instrument was a real community effort. We got permission from Hipshot to have a friend overseas make a titanium version of the tuners, D-tuner, and the bridge. Kevin Beller at Seymour Duncan made us an all-silver-wire pickup, and we cut apart one of Anthony's $2,000 instrument cables to duplicate it for the wiring. I spent three solid days wiring the bass. But it was all worth it—we flipped out when we heard the first note, and it was so gratifying to see Anthony's dream come true. This takes the bass guitar to another level, with the potential to change the way we view the instrument.

JASON DESALVO

The launch point was Fodera's 2011 Christmas party; Anthony came up and put his arm around Vinny, Joey, and me, and said, "It's time to work on No. 12 with the hybrid concept you have." That was the catalyst. Two years' worth of hard work later, when we first strung it up, we were thrilled. Vinny, who is hyper-critical, just smiled, and Anthony smiled and said, "We did it, guys!" The instrument is a whole step forward from No. 10, with more personality, more eveness, more expansiveness. To paraphrase Nigel from *This Is Spinal Tap*, No. 12 goes to 11!

The Presentation II's elegant neck joint marries an alder body and mahogany bracing to a red oak neck.

SHAPED FOR BASS

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Jackson checks in on the Presentation II build.

Carving the holly top.

Detail of the alder body and holly top and back.

Anthony and the Fodera fam.

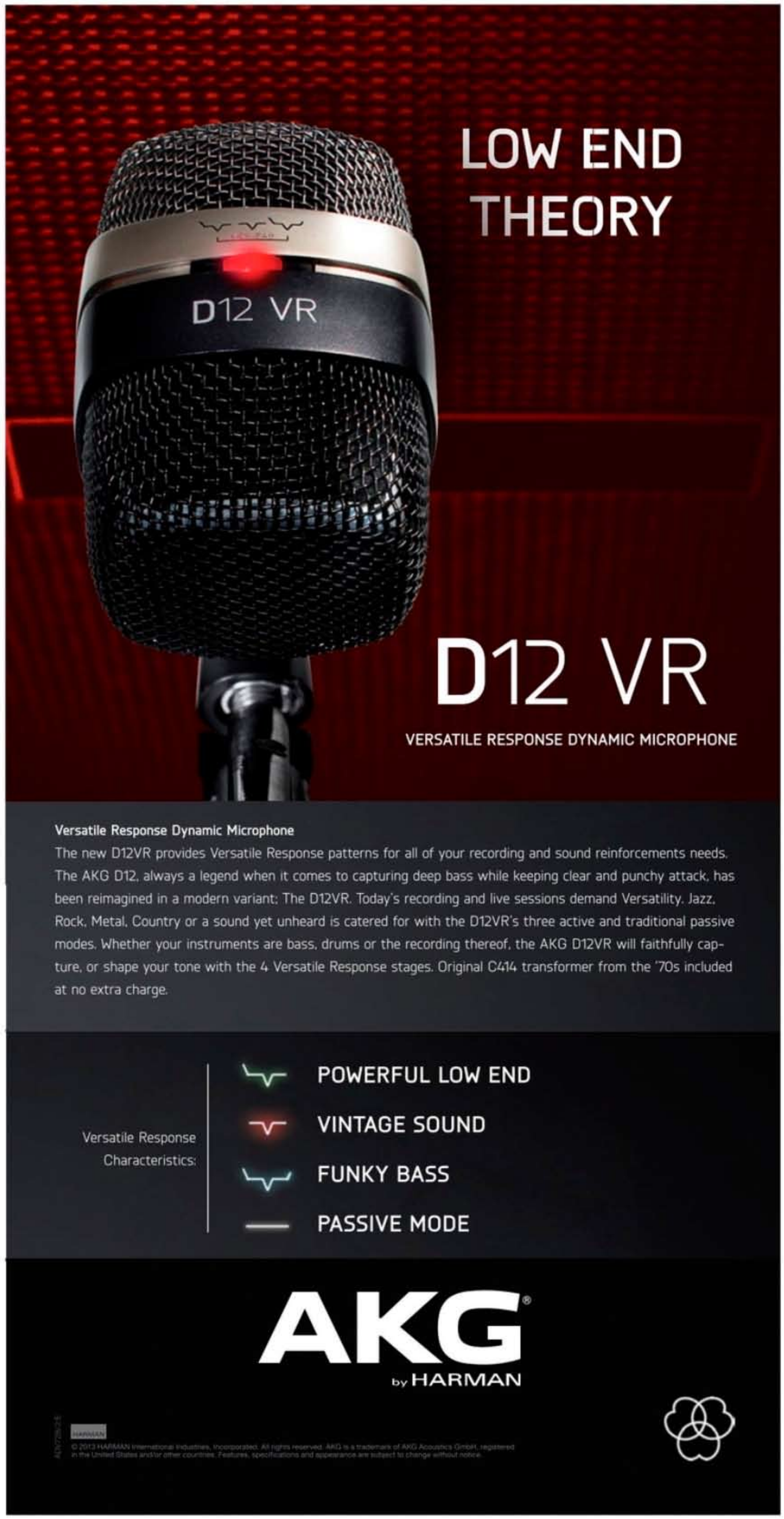
get a very acoustic sound, but with a lot of sustain and punch. The carved-out neck joint is heel-less; that came from the single-cutaway solidbody I first came up with in the '80s, at Anthony's prodding. Anthony has golden ears, is a studied perfectionist, and always pushes me with aspects of design I wouldn't think of. That's why we make a great team.

Let's talk about the woods involved.

VF We opted for alder as the main body wood; it has a nice bass tone, it's structurally sound and stable, and it finishes well. The bracing inside had to be a dry, resonant wood; I went with Honduras mahogany, which is a little stronger than spruce. For the top and back we chose holly, which is sonically equal to koa. I carved the top for an elegant look, but also because having more material enabled me to play around with where I carved away wood to get the maximum vibration and response. The fingerboard is ebony to balance the instrument's warm, bassy sound. Ebony is very hard and dense, and it rings at a high pitch and adds clarity in all the ranges. The most unusual choice was red oak for the neck; it's strong and stiff like maple, to stay put under the tension of 36"-scale strings, and the piece I chose has deep pores, so it's full of air. We also made the headstock a little bigger and at a deeper angle, to add more mass for sustain and tighter string tension; and Anthony asked for the neck to be a little wider at the body, which is always good—the bigger the neck, the more energy stays in a plucked string.

What have you learned from this type of construction, and what does it mean for future Fodera basses?

VF When you build a solidbody, the tone is largely at the mercy of how good that piece of wood is. But this kind of hybrid construction has so many variables, you have much more control over how the bass is going to vibrate and sound—especially with the top, which is crucial to the sound of a hollowbody. As it becomes increasingly more difficult to get good wood, and as resources dwindle, hybrid instruments might be the answer for the future. With regard to Fodera basses, the possibilities are endless. We can build any model in our catalog using this hybrid design. The challenge will be to tool up for it, to make it more affordable. As good as this bass turned out—and I can honestly say this is the best bass guitar I've ever built or heard—I don't think you can ever replace the solidbody bass guitar; it's too good, too practical, and too versatile. But now there's a choice for those who want something in between an acoustic and an electric sound, and we'll keep exploring it. **BP**



JAZZ CONCEPTS

Larks' Tongues & Other Minor 7th Delicacies

BY JOHN GOLDSBY

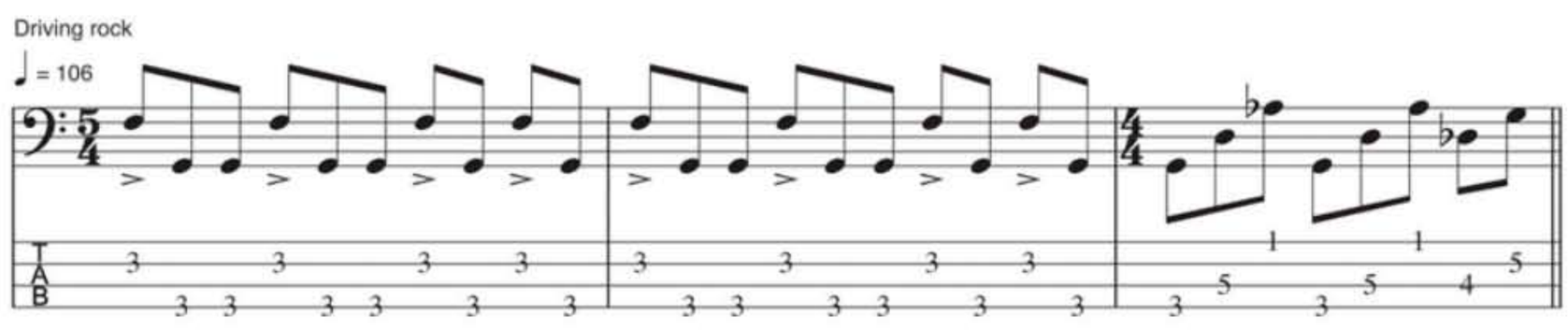
LAST MONTH WE LOOKED AT 6TH INTERVALS, WHICH ARE RATHER melodic sounding, being inversions of 3rds. This month, let's explore 7th intervals, which sound wide and angular.

In 1972, bassist John Wetton joined a new incarnation of the progressive jazz-rock-fusion-experimental band King Crimson, which was led by the brilliant guitarist and composer Robert Fripp. The band stills holds a place in the pantheon of seminal jazz-rock fusion bands of the era, alongside Genesis, Weather Report, Mahavishnu Orchestra, and some of Miles Davis' electric jam bands. When I first heard "Larks' Tongues in Aspic, Part II" [King Crimson, *Larks' Tongues in Aspic*, Island, 1973], I was struck by the power of Wetton's bass line. *What are those notes—that wacky interval he's playing?*

With some help from my slightly older, more experienced bandmates, I eventually cracked the code of the song, and we came up with our own version of "Larks' Tongues." The interval that had me puzzled? The notes *F* down to *G*—a minor 7th interval (**Ex. 1**).

Wetton's bass line is unique because of the relentless repetition of the minor 7th interval in the first two bars, with no other notes involved. Many bass lines use a minor 7th interval as part of a string of notes, but Wetton's line hammers away at the *F* and *G*. Add that to Fripp's Bartók-like melody and song form, and it's unforgettable. When I began thinking of bass lines that incorporated the minor 7th, Wetton's line came to mind first, even though I hadn't heard it in about 40 years. That's staying power in bass-line world!

EX. 1



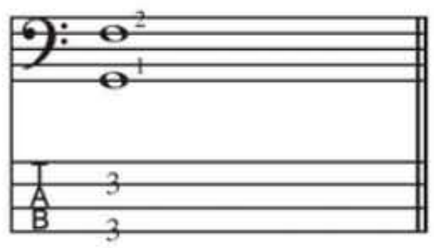
The minor 7th interval—for example, *F* on the *D* string down to *G* on the *E* string—does not sit so well on the fingerboard. Playing the two notes of a minor 7th in quick succession demands the use of either two fretting-hand fingers (**Ex. 2**), or a barre, which holds down two notes with one finger (**Ex. 3**). In this case, the *F* and *G* could be held down with the 1st finger across the strings.

Bass lines that incorporate a minor 7th interval can be found everywhere, often as part of a sequence or melodic bass line. In 1966, James Jamerson laid down a beautiful groove for the Four Tops' "Shake Me, Wake Me (When It's Over)" [*On Top*, 1966]. **Example 4** shows Jamerson jumping from a low *A♭* up to *G♭* on the *D* string. When you play this one, be sure to accent the high *G♭*, and don't shortchange the eighth-rest that follows.

Flea came up with a dangerous-sounding, acrobatic line that incorporates the minor 7th interval on "Give It Away" [Red Hot Chili Peppers, *Blood Sugar Sex Magik*, Warner Bros., 1991]. Flea's line starts on an open *A*, and then slides from high *E* on the *G* string up to a high *G*, an octave plus a minor 7th away from his starting note (**Ex. 5**).

How can you get 7th intervals under your fingers? The best way is to explore the possibilities within scales and chords. **Example 6** shows an *F* major scale in 7th intervals. Note that some of the intervals are major 7ths (marked "7" in the notation) and some are minor 7ths (m7). You can build a major 7th interval from any note by counting up or down eleven half-steps. You can build a minor 7th interval from any notes by counting up or down ten half-steps.

EX. 2



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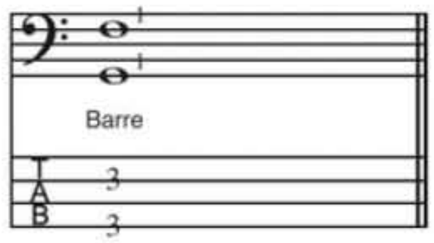

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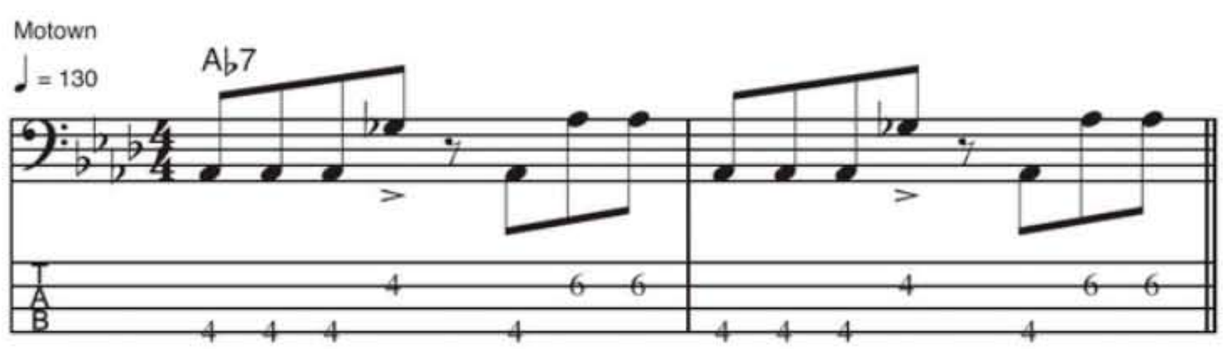
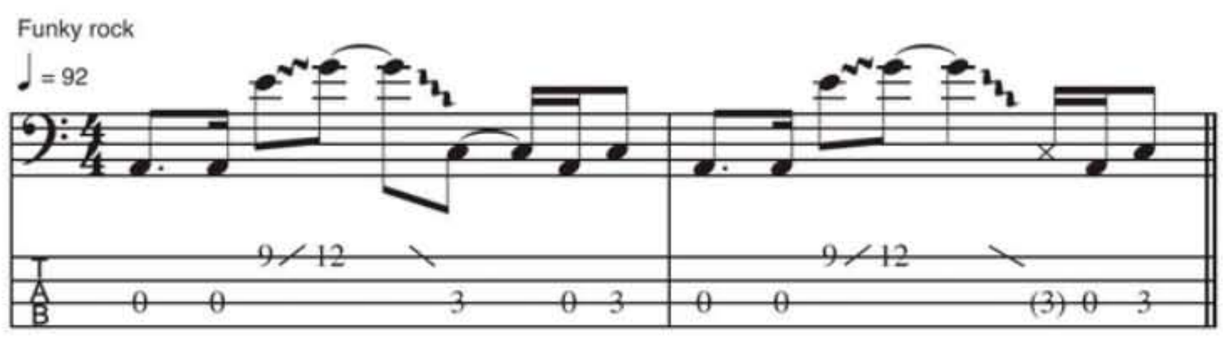
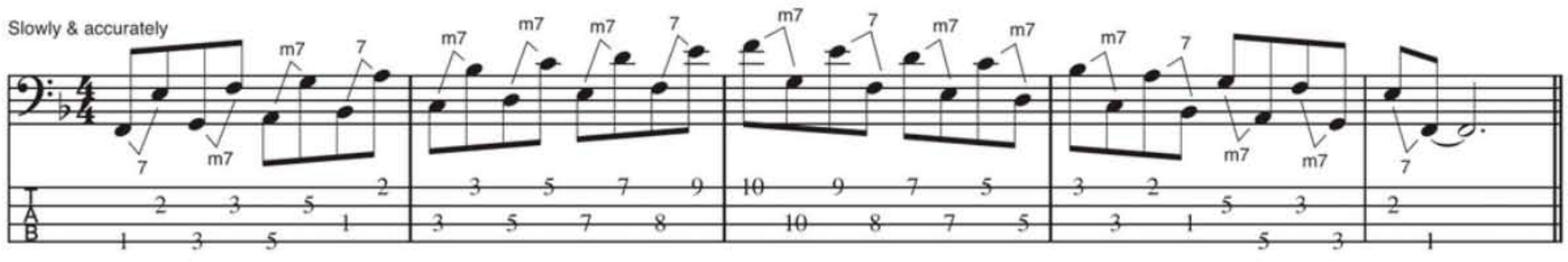


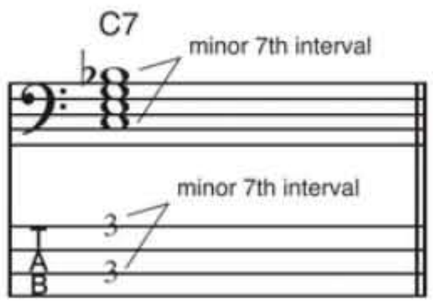
EX. 5



EX. 6



EX. 7



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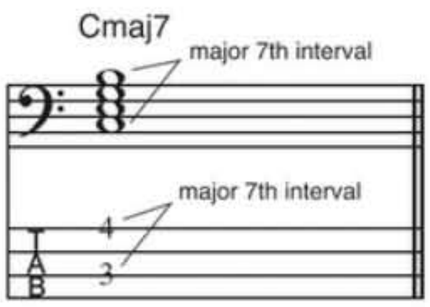
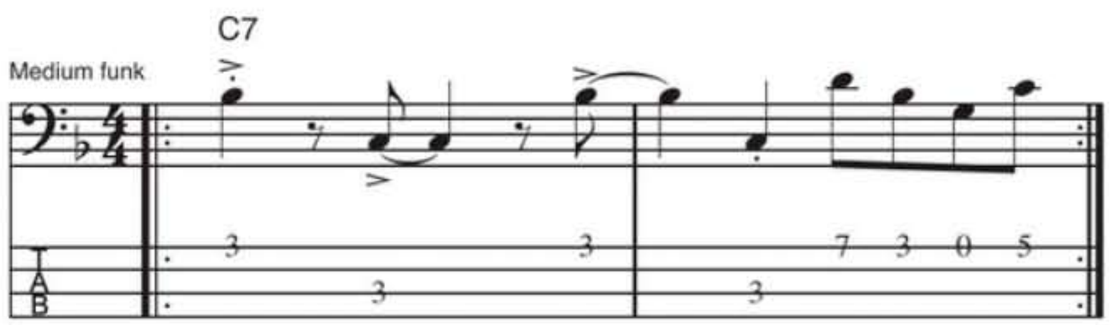


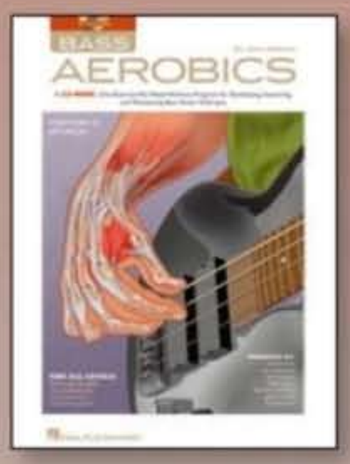
EX. 9

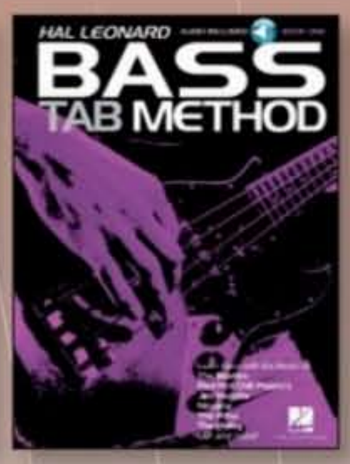


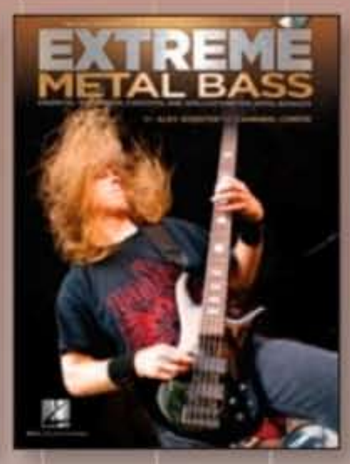
If you stay within a key signature or scale, you merely have to count up to the scale's 7th note to find a 7th interval within that scale sound. You can also think of the minor 7th interval as the distance from the root to the top note of a 7 chord (**Ex. 7**), while the major 7th interval is the distance from the root to the top note of a maj7 chord (**Ex. 8**). Once you become familiar with the way major 7ths and minor 7ths sound and feel on the bass, you'll automatically grab the correct notes.

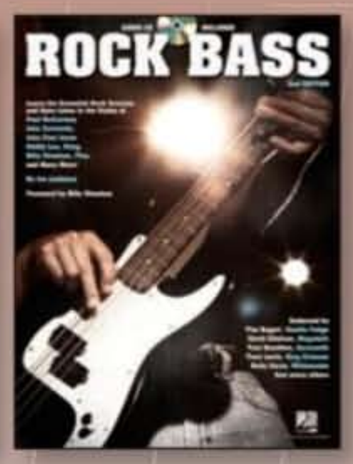
Another great way to master 7th intervals is to create your own bass lines, forcing yourself to use a particular 7th interval. **Example 9** shows a bass line that starts on *B♭* and jumps down to the root of the *C7* chord—a minor 7th interval. Although the line begins on *B♭* (the flatted 7th), it lands on the root, *C*, in both bars.

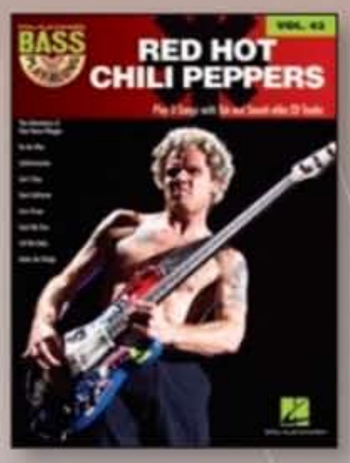
Play through the examples, and then create some of your own lines using 7th intervals. Maybe you'll come up with something like "Larks' Tongues," which bass players will still be talking about four decades later!. **BP**











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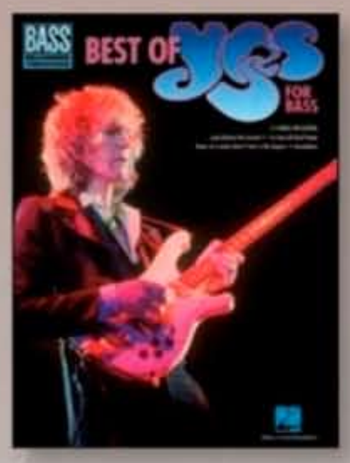
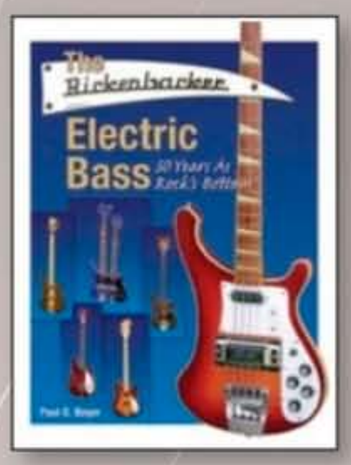
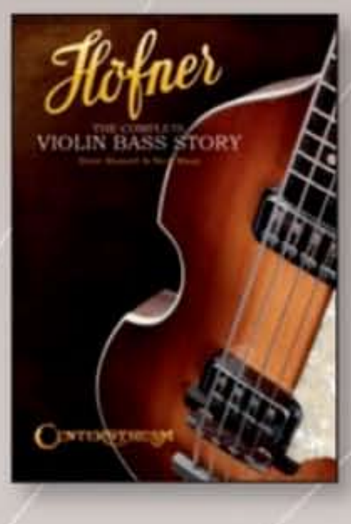


From instruction to songbooks to fun reads, if you play bass, we've got you covered.





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BLUES YOU CAN USE

Keith Ferguson

Thunder Bird

BY ED FRIEDLAND

EN ROUTE TO A STRING OF GIGS IN THE TEXAS PANHANDLE, I CAN'T HELP BUT THINK ABOUT the great blues tradition in the Lone Star State. With a history that encompasses Blind Lemon Jefferson, the fabled recordings of Robert Johnson (made in San Antonio and Dallas), T-Bone Walker, Freddie King, Johnny Winter, Stevie Ray and Jimmie Vaughan, not to mention a seemingly endless list of innovators and legends, Texas has been—and continues to be—a rich environment for this great form of American music.

Austin, Texas, is also well known for its contribution to the blues, and while the scene may not be as energized as it was during the Stevie Ray Vaughan days, there is still a dedicated talent pool performing locally, and filling tour slots with major blues artists around the world. One of the best-known bands to come from Austin is the Fabulous Thunderbirds, who in spite of their cheesy '80s hit "Tuff Enough," created some of the most rockin' Texas blues ever heard. While

INFO

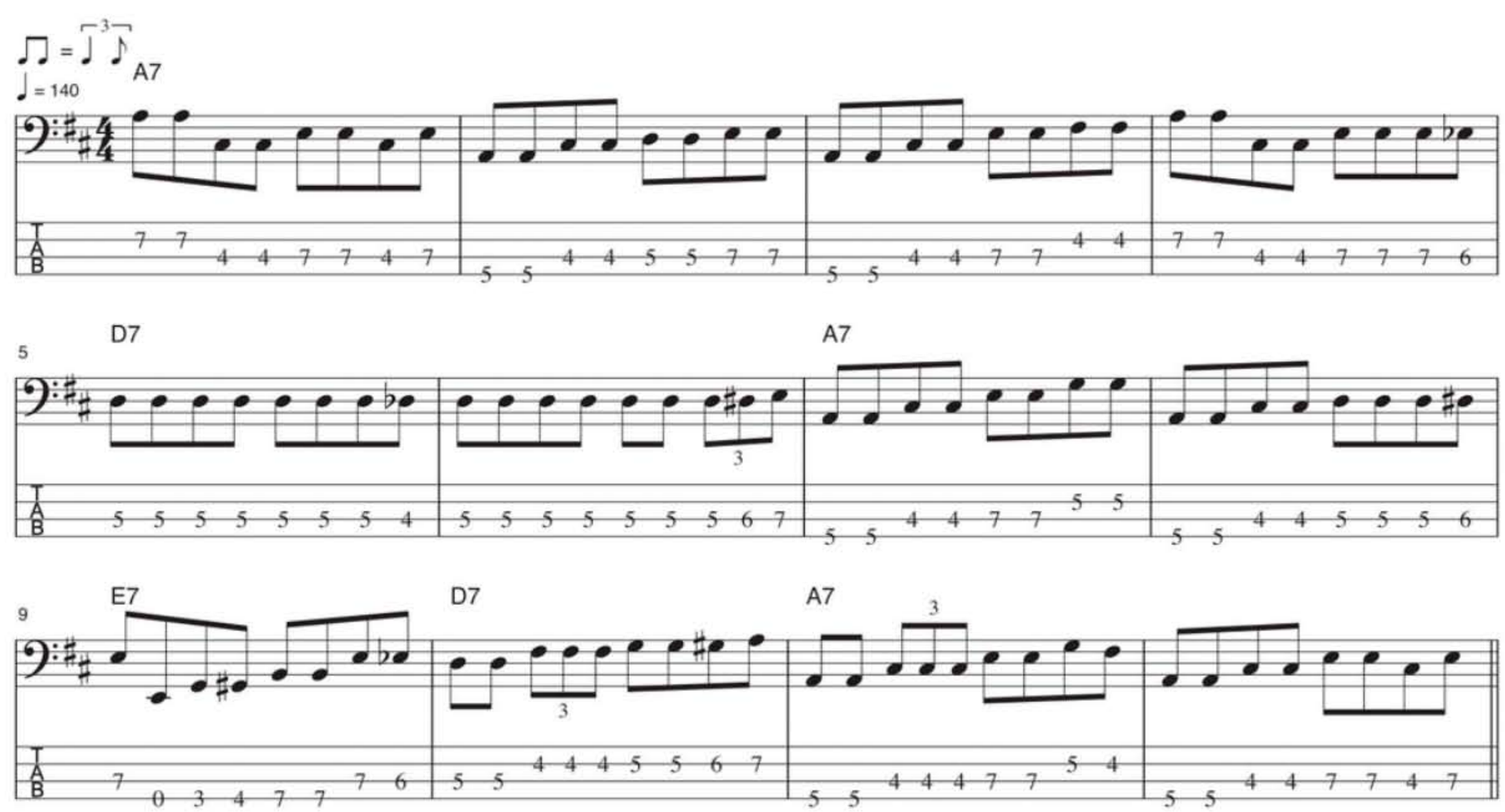
ED FRIEDLAND

Ed "the Bass Whisperer" Friedland plays, writes, and teaches out of his bass base in Austin, Texas. **edfriedland.com**

LISTEN

The Fabulous Thunderbirds, *Butt Rockin'* [Benchmark Recordings, 1981]

EX. 1



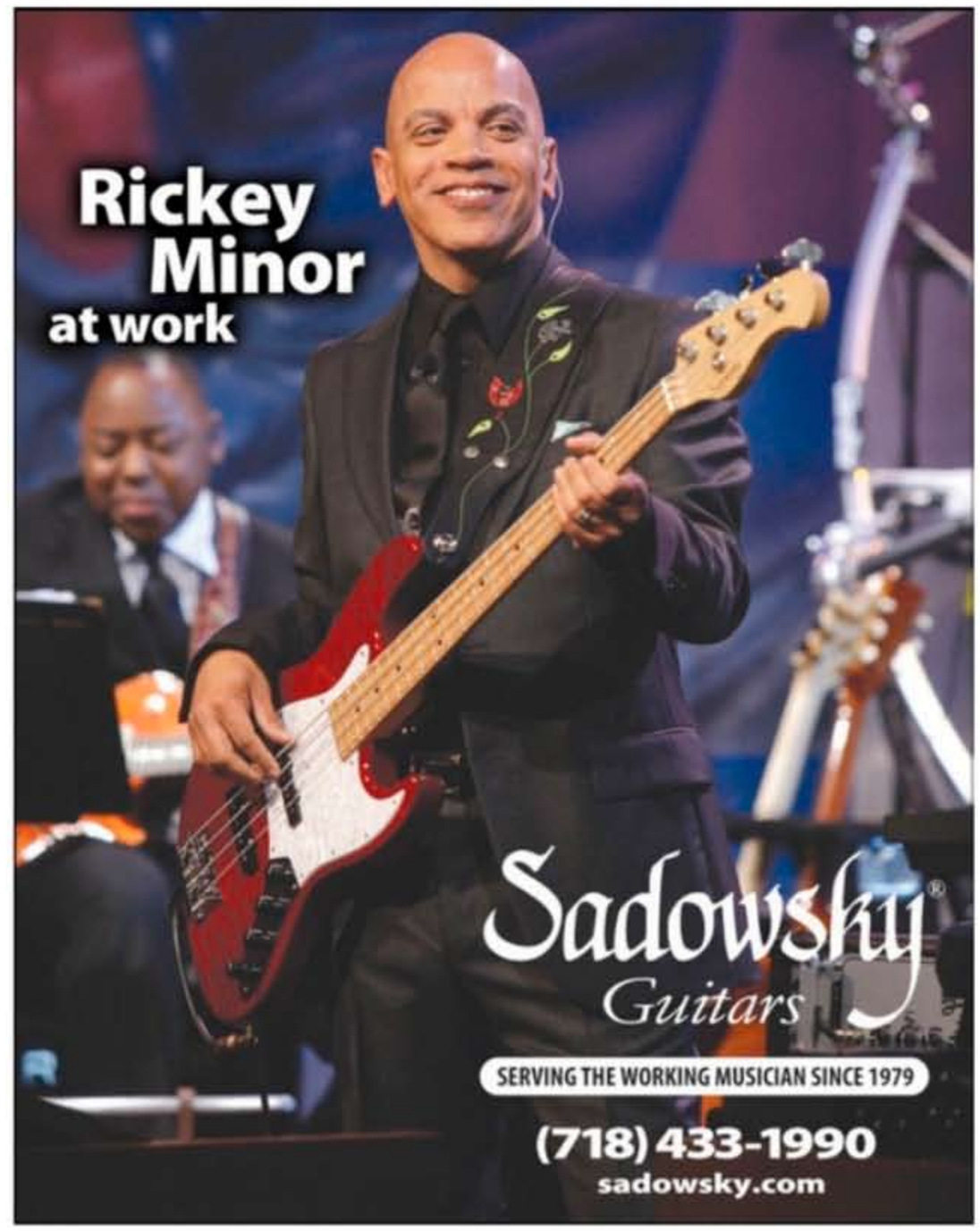
frontman Kim Wilson is still touring with a group of young lions under the T-Bird name, most people refer back to the classic lineup of Wilson on vocals and harp, Jimmie Vaughan on guitar, Mike Buck or Fran Christina on drums, and the man we'll focus on this month, bassist Keith Ferguson.

The Houston native played an integral part in the burgeoning Texas blues revival of the late '60s to early '70s, performing with Johnny Winter, Stevie Ray Vaughan (pre-Double Trouble), and co-founding the Fabulous Thunderbirds. The T-Birds were once described as "the first white blues band that didn't look or sound like hippies," and their first four albums feature Ferguson laying down thick slabs of bottom, with unapologetic authority. Post-Thunderbirds, Keith was a founding member of the Tail Gators, and appeared on Carlos Santana's *Havana Moon*. He spent his remaining years in Austin, passing away in 1997.

This month's example is the 12-bar intro chorus Keith played on "Tell Me Why," a stomper from the T-Birds' *Butt Rockin'* album [Benchmark Recordings, 1981]. Keith's '52 Fender Precision has a burnished growl, and his lines unobtrusively support while stoking the flames with rhythm section mate Fran Christina. (In response to several reader questions regarding my use of key signatures: Although *A7* is the I chord for a blues progression in *A*, the song is not in the key of *A* major. To make the key signature reflect the tonality of the I chord, I use the key signature of *D* major, as *A7* is its V chord.) Because this example is a "double stroker," I've used the shuffle eighth-note indicator in the upper left corner. This makes for less visual clutter in the measure—simply interpret the eighth-notes with a shuffle feel.

The line itself is a straightforward triad-based part, but Ferguson starts on the octave in bar 1, dropping to the low *A* in bar 2. Whether it was deliberate or not, bars 3 and 4 are a mirror image of that phrase. In bar 5, Keith simply stamps out the root on the IV chord, which makes this boogie-shuffle kind of funky. A quick chromatic triplet takes us back to the I chord, followed by a classic chromatic ascending pattern to the V chord that peaks on the octave of the V chord in bar 9. Keith quickly drops down to the low *E* and builds his way back up, spicing up the IV chord with a triplet on the *F♯*, a motif he repeats on the I chord in bar 11. The track struts and smolders for 2:26, with Ferguson building his lines dynamically throughout, though never straying far from the beaten path.

If you're a blues fan, *Butt Rockin'* is a must-have CD—Jimmie Vaughan is lean and mean, Wilson's vocals and harp work are exemplary, and Keith Ferguson and Fran Christina are the epitome of a top-shelf blues rhythm section. **BP**



TRANSCRIPTION

"Rhythm Of Your Mind"

Jamaaladeen Tacuma's Complete Bass Line

BY CHRIS JISI | PHOTOGRAPH BY SOUND EVIDENCE

NOT ALL '70S BASS HEROES WERE CREATED EQUALLY. While Stanley Clarke and Jaco Pastorius and their dexterous disciples reigned over the mainstream, one of the era's most original voices shared the same Philly roots as Stanley and Jaco, but took a decidedly freer and more fringe path to 4-string fame. Growing up in the City of Brotherly Love, Jamaaladeen Tacuma took notice of R&B bass, leading him to start picking out bass lines on an acoustic guitar before his mom presented him with a semi-hollow Kimberly electric. Just 16, he got in his first soul cover band within a week, going to school on the feels of Ronnie Baker, James Jamerson, Chuck Rainey, Willie Weeks, and Val Burke. In 1975, fresh from a stint with organist Charles Earland, 19-year-old Jamaaladeen got word from Philly producers Reggie Lucas and James Mtume that saxophoist Ornette Coleman wanted him to come up to New York City to play in his band, Prime Time. Tacuma's ability to combine funk with free jazz—"free funk"—led to an 11-year run with the avant-jazz icon, and also opened the bassist's mind. "I had always felt the bass was equal to any instrument, and I always wanted to be an improvisor," he says. "Ornette's compositional approach to improvising enabled me to think and play in that way."

The liberation also led to Tacuma's solo career on the Gramavison label, beginning with 1983's aptly titled *Show Stopper*—given his aggressive playing approach and stylish, offbeat fashion sense. Considering the diversity that artists reach for on today's recordings, in the hopes of placing a track in multiple formats, Jamaaladeen was ahead of his time: His albums routinely featured funk, dance, electronica, vocal pop tunes and covers, straightahead jazz, and experimental jazz, to "show all his sides and colors." Perhaps Tacuma's most succinct bass anthem is his Ornette-inspired bass-and-drums duet, "Rhythm of Your Mind," from his 1988 Grammy-nominated album *Jukebox*. He cut the track at his own Sound Genetics Recording in Philly, sending his trademark headless/bodiless Steinberger (with roundwound La Bella strings) direct, while Dennis Alston played electronic drums (some of his own design). The pair rehearsed the tune a few times and captured it on the first take, making no fixes or punches.

INFO

LISTEN

Jamaaladeen Tacuma, *Jukebox* [Grammavision, 1988]

CONNECT

Watch Jamaaladeen play "Rhythm of Your Mind" live on VH-1. **bassplayer.com/march2014**

The track begins with a two-bar drum fill that ends on beat *three* of bar 2 (marked by the accented *E*). At Letter **A**, Tacuma states the melody alone for the first eight bars, with Alston adding fills at the end of every other bar (which includes a pitched pad). At bar 11, Alston comes in with a full-on groove, for which he chooses steady 16ths on the kick drum via his double-bass-drum pedal. The melody then ends in bars 19 and 20, with Tacuma's descending 5ths. Regarding the 18-bar head (which, like the rest of the track, has no given key or chord changes), Tacuma explains, "This tune is born out of Ornette's harmolodic approach, where the melody, harmony, and rhythm are moving in the same linear direction, simultaneously. It's not limited by Western harmony, even though a harmony is suggested [*A* to *G* triads]; I'm free to utilize all 12 notes."

Letter **B** is the start of Tacuma's solo, for which he applies Coleman's aforementioned concept of compositional improvisation. "Ornette teaches that when improvising, anything you play should be equal to or better than the melody. When you start to think about what you're improvising as being a composition, it makes you really get inside what you're playing and try to come up with musical ideas that advance the music forward, as opposed to playing riffs or licks." In bars 21–22 and 23–24, Tacuma plays call-and-response-type phrases. "I use that a lot, because it creates musical interest and makes a statement and a cadence." Further embellishing the idea through bar 28, he stays in a general

E Dorian vein. "Part of that is probably from me being a bass player and always having to stay around a tonal center." At bar 29, he begins an ascending sequence using chromaticism. "Ornette used to tell folks, 'Jamal is the master of the sequence'—I think it was because that was the way his playing sounded to me. I just tried to transfer what I heard from him to the bass guitar."

Working his way further up the neck back in *E* Dorian territory in bars 31–33, Tacuma drops down in range and motion in 34–35, for contrast and perhaps to take a breath for the solo's last climactic leg. This launches with his working his way through *D*, *G*, *C*, *E*, and *A* triads in bars 34–37, and then finding his way to the dramatic upper-register sequence (against his open *D* string) in 40–41. "I'm constantly reaching when I solo, and reacting to what I just played," he says. Continuing to dance up on the *G* and *D* strings in bars 42–44, he alludes to *D*, *C*, and *B♭* triads before dropping down a bit in 45–46 to masterfully outline the following series of V–I cadences in an asymmetrical phrase with a diminishing amount of notes: *A–D*, *D–G*, *E♭–A♭*, *D♭–G♭*, *C–F*, and *B–E*. Bar 46 stretches two extra beats, but with the sequence ending on an *E*, Tacuma felt it was the right time to recap the head (with subtle variations), at **C**—and indeed, when you listen to the track, it flows naturally.

Jamaaladeen advises, "Learn the head and the solo, and play along with the track; then play along again and take your own solo, applying harmolodic principles. Be free with it." He adds, "The melody is definitely propelling forward, but I'm stil thinking of being inside the groove and being tight with it. So be sure to relax and breathe between the phrases in order not to rush."

Tacuma is fresh off recording a trio CD, *Bon Vivant* (with guitarist Vernon Reid and drummer G. Calvin Weston), and he's heading to Europe for 2014 dates with his band Brotherzone, featuring guitarist Jean Bourelly. **BP**

5 Jamaaladeen Jams

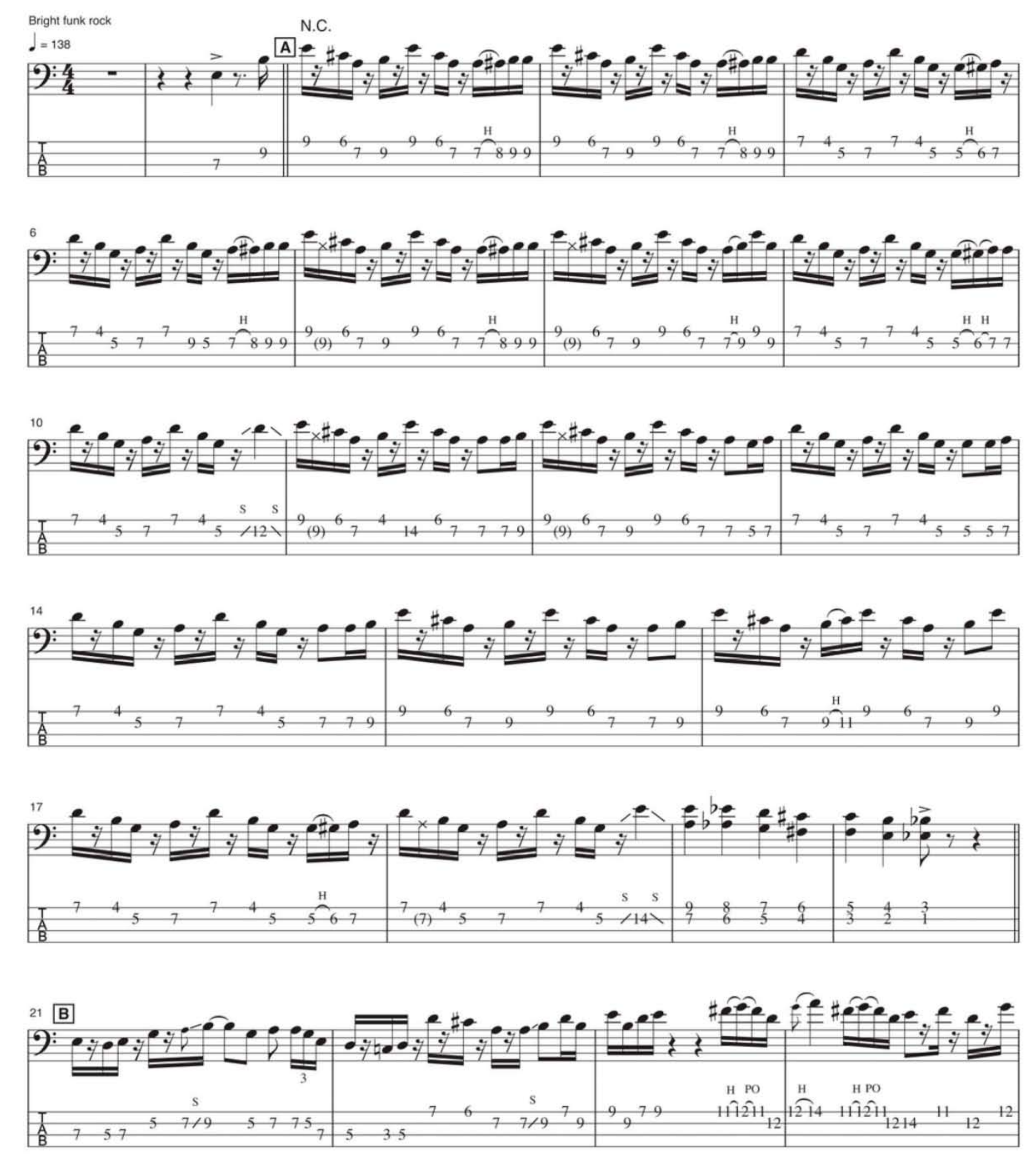
1 Jamaaladeen Tacuma, **"Show Stopper,"** *Show Stopper* [Gramavison, 1983]
2 Jamaaladeen Tacuma, **"Bass in Ya Face,"** *Dreamscape* [DWI, 1998]
3 Jamaaladeen Tacuma, **"Dreamscape,"** *Dreamscape* [DWI, 1998]
4 Jamaaladeen Tacuma & Tony Kofi, **"For the Love of Ornette,"** *For the Love of Ornette* [Jazzwerkstatt 2011]
5 Free Form Funky Freqs, **"Strut of the Peacock,"** *Bon Vivant* [Jam-All Productions, 2013]

10 Top Tacuma Sides

1 Ornette Coleman, *Dancing in Your Head* [A&M, 1976]
2 James "Blood" Ulmer, *Tales of Captain Black* [DIW, 1978]
3 Ornette Coleman, *Of Human Feelings* [Antilles, 1979]
4 The Golden Palominos, *The Golden Palominos* [Celluloid, 1983]
5 Jamaaladeen Tacuma, *Music World* [Gramavision, 1986]
6 Jamaaladeen Tacuma, *Boss of the Bass* [Gramavision, 1996]
7 Jamaaladeen Tacuma & the Roots, *Groove 2000* [P-Vine, 1998]
8 Brotherzone, *Brotherzone* [ZYX Music, 2001]
9 Basso Nouveau, *All Basses Covered* [Moers Music, 2005]
10 Jamaaladeen Tacuma & Uwe Kropinski, *Zwei* [Jazzwerkstatt, 2010]

"Rhythm Of Your Mind" By Jamaaladeen Tacuma

Transcription by Chris Jisi



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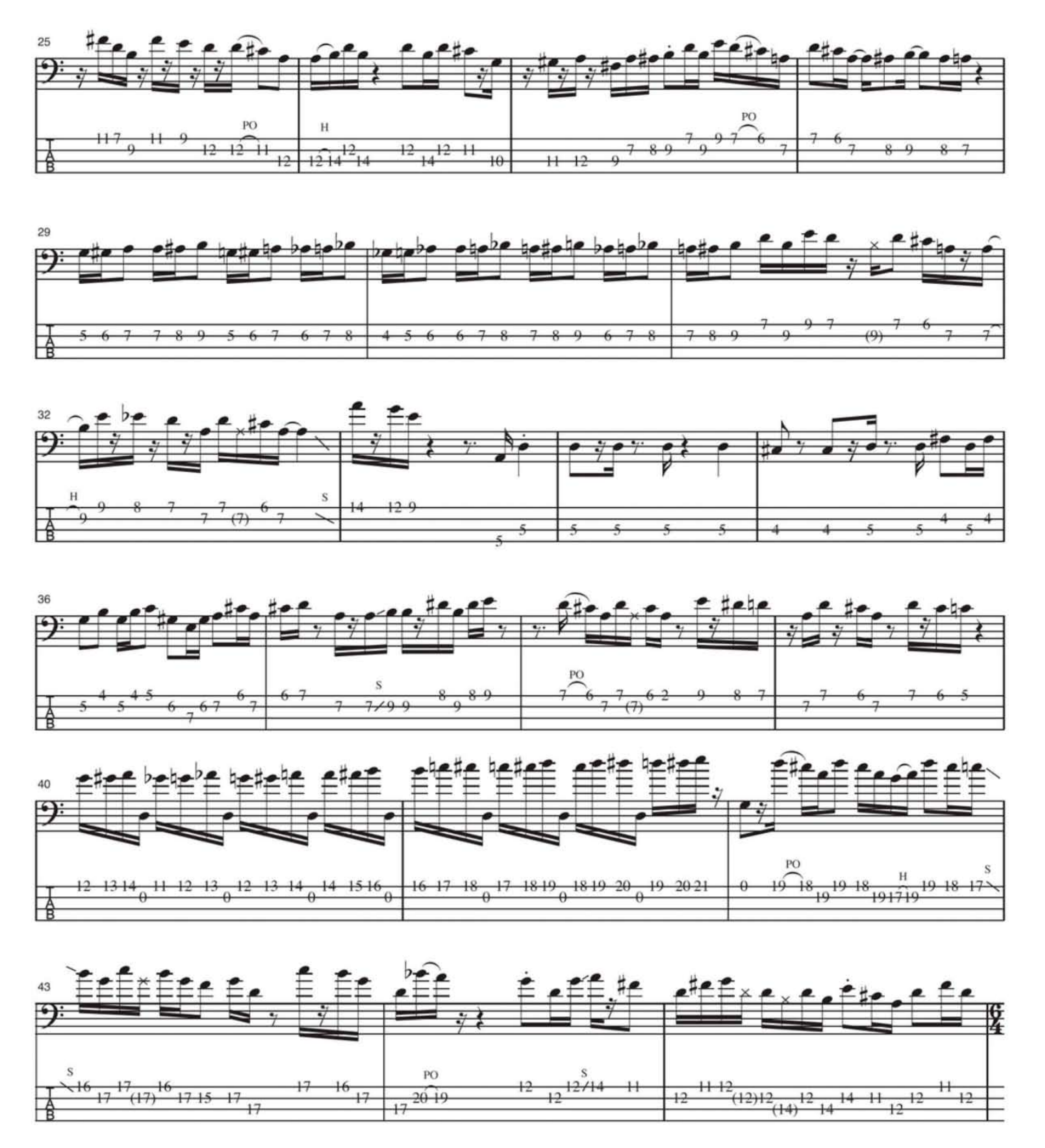
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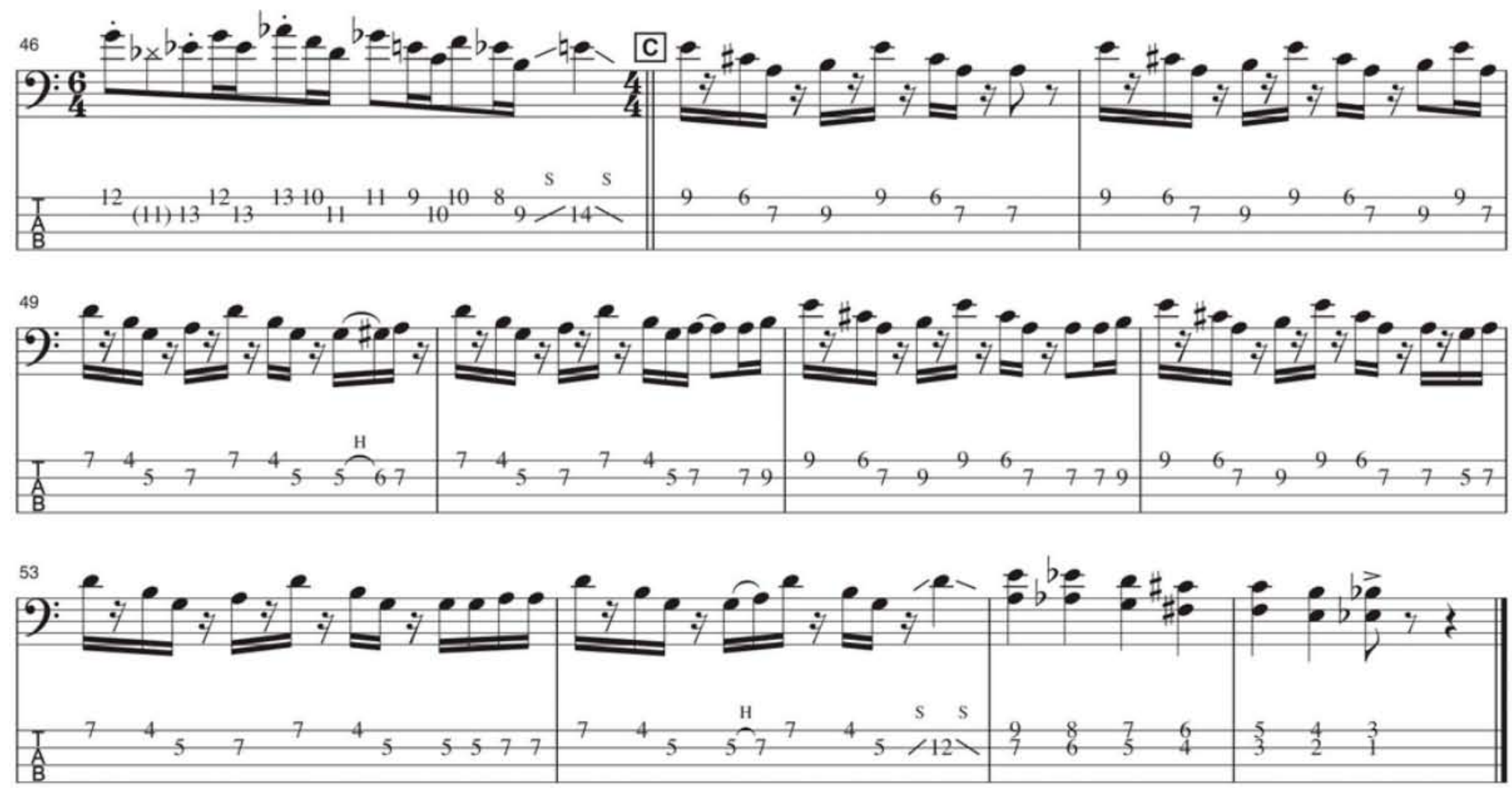
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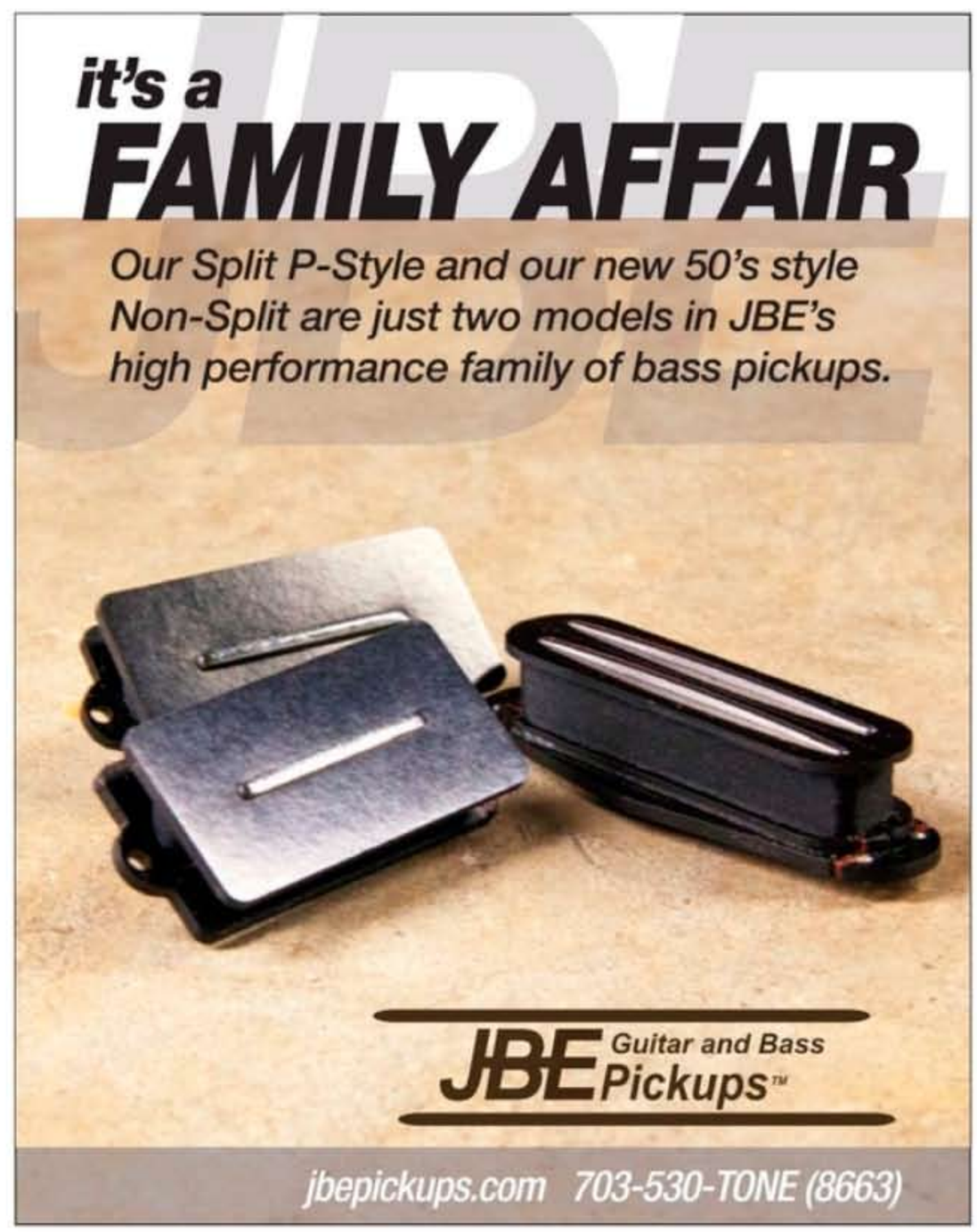
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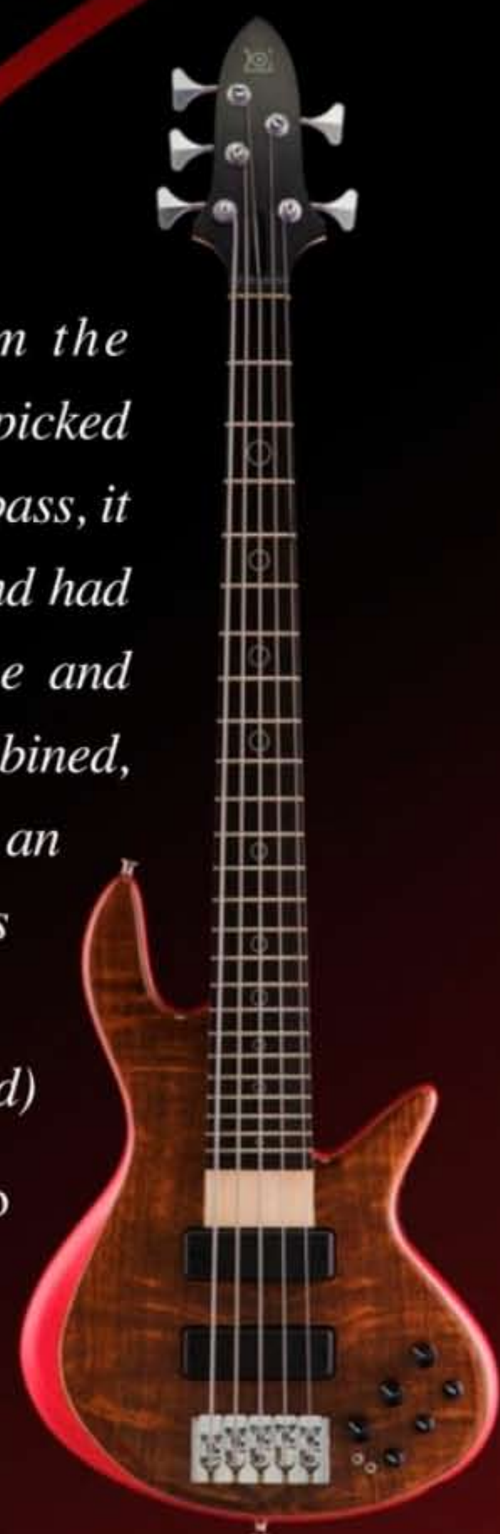

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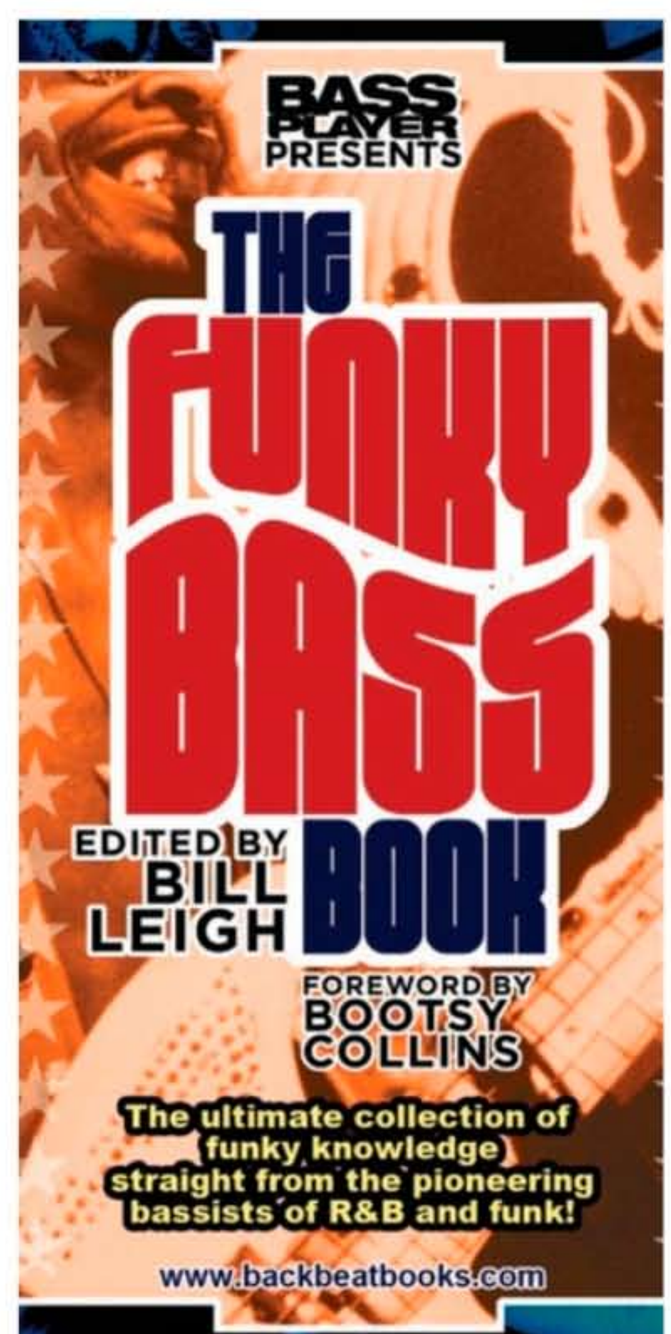
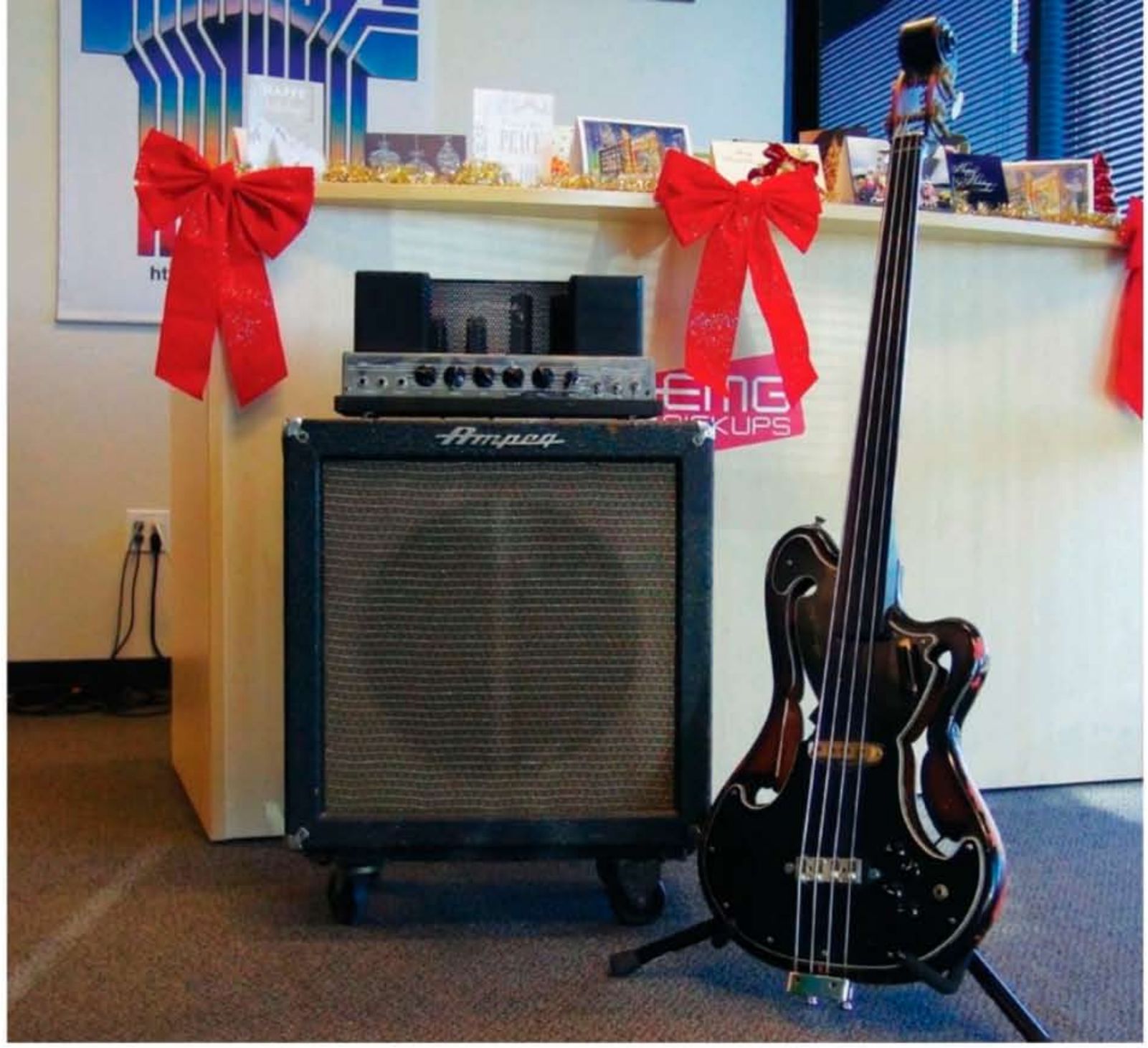


Bobby Vega is a world-class collector and vintage bass freak of the first order. The gear is real. The stories are true. The dates are foggy. And the names of the innocent have been changed to protect their identities... and save Bobby's ass!



BOBBY'S BASSMENT

1960/61 Ampeg B-15 & Late-'60s Ampeg AUB-1 Scroll Bass

FROM THE LATE '60S THROUGH THE '70S, I'D GO TO EVERY music store I could find in the San Francisco Bay Area. Sometime around 1974, I heard about a store in Mill Valley called Prune Music; people were saying Prune had some cool old guitars, basses, and amps (old gear wasn't called "vintage" yet). I lived in San Francisco, so to get to Mill Valley, I had to drive over the Golden Gate Bridge. Back in those days, I didn't know where I was going most of the time, and would often wind up getting lost. Sometimes, the journey itself was the prize.

So I hopped in my Ford Pinto and finally got to Prune Music. I walked in and saw all this really cool stuff—used Teles, Strats, acoustic guitars, basses, and amps. I wasn't looking for it, but boy, I found it: an old amp that looked like a toaster or a radio. I asked if I could try it out, and then I plugged in. Man, I had never played through an amp that sounded like this. It had *that* sound, the sound I'd heard on so many records—real warm, like the 45s that were played through the old jukeboxes.

Right while I was playing, a lady came over and told me I sounded good. When she noticed that I played with a pick, she told me she played bass with a pick too, and she introduced herself. That lady was the one and only Carol Kaye. I didn't know who she was...oops! (If you don't know who Carol Kaye is, Google her. You will be amazed.)

So I asked the guy how much the amp was. He said $165. I told him I'd take it, but I didn't have any money—I had to go home and get it. Another trip over the Golden Gate Bridge! That was going to be four times in one day. I paid about $179 out the door. I put the Ampeg B-15 in my Pinto, went home, and played bass all night long. Man, I was a happy duck.

Later on, I found out that Prune Music is where Randy Smith made the first Mesa/Boogie amps, and that Carol Kaye was giving bass lessons there. Eventually, I would record with Lee Michaels, who ran Globe Studios in the back of the store. Wow—all in one building!

A couple decades later, I was at David Freiberg's house recording some tracks. David, one the greats, is my friend and mentor; he also founded Quicksilver Messenger Service in the '60s and played bass and keyboards for Jefferson Starship. While I was at his house, I saw this cool old fretless Ampeg Scroll/"pretzel" bass like the one Rick Danko used in *The Last Waltz* when The Band played with the Staple Singers. I asked David about the bass, and he told me that it belonged to Grateful Dead drummer Mickey Hart, who had given it to him. I said, "Wow, cool!"

Then David said, "I'm not using it—would you like it?" I couldn't say anything; I was at a loss for words. After a while, I managed to say "yes," and "thank you." Man, how lucky is that? The Ampeg Scroll Bass was reputed to be the first production fretless electric bass. The one I have has a transducer below the bridge for a pickup—it sounds great, kind of like an Ampeg Baby Bass—and it also has a Telecaster Bass pickup that sounds great for R&B stuff. And this bass kills for salsa and reggae music! I'll put up some videos soon. Until then, may the groove be with us. —BOBBY VEGA

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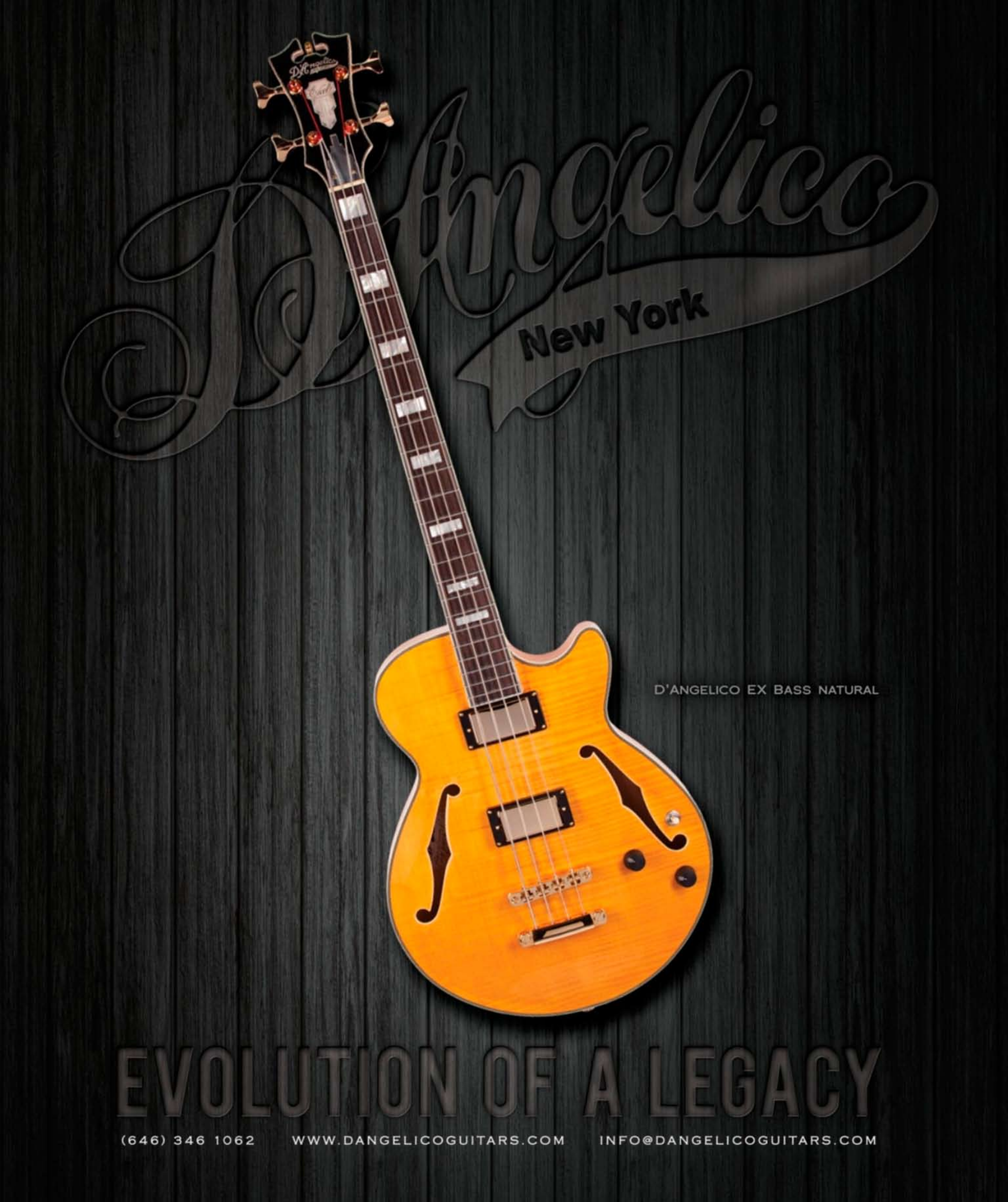
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